**Make a Heaven of Hell**

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# Make a Heaven of Hell

by obfuscatedheart

Summary

Will has lived a very ordinary life, with the minor exception of his severe iron allergy and general aversion to touch. He in no way believed in the existence of magic or had any concept of secondary genders... until an Unseelie prince recognized him for a changeling and set out to court him.

Notes

I had the absolute pleasure to work with Kishafisha again who has created beautiful work once again which has inspired this absolute beast. They also were an absolute angel and beta-read this fic. You can find the art here and them here

- Inspired by Art Inspiration for “Make a Heaven of Hell” by obfuscatedheart by kishafisha

# Chapter 1

Will had always been an odd child. His father had said it often to him, never quite sure what to make of him. The oddest thing had been how much Will had screamed whenever his father held him, something his father had been sure to throw in his face later when he was older.

Will had counted himself lucky when he was able to finally escape that life, unsure how much longer he would have survived his father's care. He knew that the man blamed him for his mother's disappearance. "Changeling freak" was his father's favorite nickname for him.

His first day in the Police Academy makes him feel alive and free, like he was finally able to breathe properly. Will enjoys his time in the academy for the most part, apart from the lessons in restraint, for every time some lays a hand on him Will wants to scream and tear the person to shreds and then his skin off his body. Handcuffs prove tricky, too. When he is taught how to use them, and he is handcuffed to show the proper technique, his skin bursts into hives. He is taken to Medical afterwards and diagnosed with an iron allergy. His doctor states that it isn't the most unusual thing he had seen, but definitely close. When he learns to use a firearm he has to wear gloves to stop the weapons from hurting his hands. In spite of the material covering his hands, he feels the burn of the iron.

After 11 long weeks Will graduates along with his class and they soon learn that he is not someone who enjoys the usual slaps on his shoulder that the others like doling out. He is quickly assigned to New Orleans. Will loves the city, despite the masses that sprawl over the streets.

Will should have known that it was too good to be true. It should have just been a simple raid, the only intel had been about girls being held hostage in the house, but he should have been aware that their captors were armed. The pain rips through him as the bullet lodges in his shoulder. The pain is indescribable. Will can feel the iron of the bullet burning him from the inside. He screams as he is hauled into the ambulance and then he is no longer conscious.

When he wakes up he is in a hospital bed with wires and tubes leading away from his body to machines that chirp and hum around him. The nurse in his room notices that he has woken and carefully slides the tube out of his throat. Will can feel the deep, dull ache in his shoulder even through the fog of the pain medication. She calls a doctor in, who explains that he had been shot, and that they had needed to remove the bullet during surgery. The doctor's face looks disappointed and Will thinks he knows what is going to come out of his mouth next.

"Your iron allergy made this a lot harder."

"I won't be able to work as a cop," Will says, his voice is rough.

"You will, eventually. But it will take months of physical therapy." The doctor pats him gently on a covered leg, which Will knows is supposed to be soothing, but he still cringes away from the touch and the doctor moves his hand instantly.

The thought of physical therapy scares Will, he knows that it will likely involve someone touching him for long stretches of time, and he isn't sure how he will react.

"You'll have to stay here another day or two, just to make sure that there is no nerve damage."

"Right," Will says, considering what he will do, no longer sure that the escape of working as an officer is what it used to be.

"Well I will see you later this afternoon," The doctor says after a long pause. He is put-off by Will's demeanour and Will can sense the man's desperation to get as far away from Will as possible.

He chuckles once the room is empty, feeling as though the die has been recast on his life. Will suddenly wants to leave New Orleans, wants to get far away from the city.

He is released from the hospital with his arm in a sling and a bag of pills that rattle with every step. He has a voicemail from his chief waiting when he gets into his apartment. Will listens to it as he carefully pours himself some water. The chief assures him that he will still have a job when he is healed enough to return, even if it's just desk duty. He takes one of the pain pills with the water and then settles on his couch.

He flicks through the channels, finally resting on some sort of show on forensic science. Will makes a decision then as he begins to tire and he stumbles to his bed.

The next day he has to return to the hospital to have his dressing changed, he tries not to wince as the nurse works on the bandage. She looks at the wound approvingly. "You're healing quite quickly."

"Yeah," Will says after a moment. "I always have."

"You might be able to have the stitches out sooner rather than later."

"That's good."

She applies a fresh bandage and Will quickly puts his shirt back on to avoid having his naked skin touched. She hands him a sealed dressing and says, "You can probably do this at home now."

Will smiles for the first time in a while. "Thank you. I really appreciate it."

"If the wound begins to look infected, come straight back."

Will nods and then he is dismissed. He makes his way back to his apartment and when he gets there he begins researching forensic science programs. A few schools look interesting, and he realises that he has a few weeks before applications close. Without a second thought, he begins to draft an application for George Washington University. He isn't even sure why GWU is the one that makes it to the top of his list.

His mouse hovers over the submit button for long moments and then, almost as if returning to himself, he stands and goes to his kitchen, pouring himself a couple of fingers of whiskey. He downs it in one go, wincing at the burn of the liquid. Will paces through the living room, each step jarring his arm slightly, but it grounds him.

After another few  passes of his living room, he pours himself a few fingers more and downs that, too. These burn slightly less than the first. He sits back down in front of the computer and, after a moment's hesitation, he clicks the submit button. Will is breathing heavily and with a dizzy head he goes to bed.

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Grad school is as Will expected. The classes are relentless, and for the most part his fellow students are too busy with chasing student life to bother him. He is asked on a few dates until his constant gruff rebuffs stop anyone else from asking. Will prefers it that way.

He is glad when he is standing on the stage being handed his diploma. He had been asked to give a speech as valedictorian but refused, as it is not something that he has ever had any desire to do. He is far more excited to start working again, and is thankful for the job he has lined up for himself. The FBI had almost thrown themselves at him when he had applied.

Entering Quantico for the first time comes with a cacophony of sound from the various agents, and Will quickly learns to build forts in his head to stop the noise. Field work as a forensic scientist makes him feel as alive as working toward being a homicide detective had. He is able to find links where no one else can. He meets Crawford during one of the cases. The man is like a battering ram against his forts. Loud in a way few people are, domineering in both stature and personality. Will finds himself bending to the man to relieve the pressure.

Crawford begins to ask him for advice on cases and Will submits to it. He hates every second of being inside killers' heads, but Will allows it. Until he breaks down one day. He takes leave, stuck in a crappy apartment in Stafford. When he returns, he talks to his director and they tell him that he can work as a teacher at Quantico or quit. Reluctantly, he takes the teaching job. It keeps Crawford off his back.

He finds a house in Wolf Trap, out in the countryside, and his commute now takes an hour, but it is an hour he treasures. The house is in a state of disrepair, but he fixes it up in the summer evenings.

Will's first dog he finds one day when he is walking out of the grocery store, tied to a street light. He takes the dog home, sitting it on the passenger seat beside him and the entire ride home, Will has a hand on it. He can't quite keep the smile off of his face. Once he cleans it up he realises she is a female dog. She is small and white with an underbite that means she will likely never be adopted. Will names her Zoe and decides to keep her.

Collecting dogs from that point on is easy; he finds them in shelters, on the streets, and even once in a dumpster. For ease, Will sets up his bed in the living room, for it makes him feel safe being in his dogs' company.

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Will ends a lecture and the students file out of the room, though one stays behind to try and win favor. He sighs, for they should know by now that Will is not a teacher that plays favorites. Before he can shoot them down, they scurry out the room at the sound of determined footsteps. Will would know those footsteps anywhere. He puts his glasses back on, though he doesn't want to look the man directly in the eye. Crawford shoulders his way into his view, but luckily the glasses block out his eyes.

"I'm Special Agent Jack Crawford. I lead the Behavioral Science Unit."

Will almost wants to scoff.

"We've met."

He can feel the amusement roll off Crawford in waves. Of course he is introducing himself; it's for the benefit of the students no doubt listening into the conversation. Makes him seem important. Which, he supposes, is true.

Jack is just the way he has always been, pushing Will for more. But when Crawford tells them that there are missing girls, his heart leaps in horror. Will knows he can help, unsure of what the cost might be. So when Will tells him he has an active imagination, Crawford smiles like a shark that has scented blood. "Can I borrow your imagination?"

He follows Crawford from the room and through the bowels of Quantico.

He is led into Crawford's office where a map is displayed on a board, stuck with seven pins and seven pictures of seven girls, all in their late teens. They are young and all look very similar.

Crawford puts another pin into the map and hands Will a picture. She looks the same as every other one of the girls.

"Number eight?"

"Elise Nichols. St. Cloud State on the Mississippi. Disappeared Friday. Supposed to house sit for her parents over the weekend. Feed their cat. Never made it home."

Will knows that the other seven girls are dead, as no one would pick another victim if the others were still around.

He looks at the photos again. "They all look like Mall of America. That's a lot of wind-chafed skin."

Crawford nods. "Same hair color. Same eye color. Roughly the same age, height, weight. What is it about all these girls?"

"It's about all of these girls. It's about one of them."

Will reaches to the board and pins up the picture of Elise Nichols.

He knows that the killer is searching for his Golden Ticket amongst these girls. Each one is so similar to the next; this killer is need-driven. But Will doesn't know yet what that need is. Crawford latches on to the Golden Ticket and suggests that he is building up to her but Will disagrees. He would have hidden her amongst the others. After all, no one can know how special she is.

Then Jack asks him what he was most afraid of: "Help me find some evidence."

Crawford is almost pleading. Who is Will to say no to that?

Will sighs before saying, "That may require me to be sociable."

Crawford sighs and then turns to Will. "Have you got a go bag?"

"At home." He has never quite shaken himself of the habit of having one. He had one for almost his entire life. Easier to move around if his life could be lifted up.

"That's an hour's drive."

"That it is."

"Okay, meet me at the airfield in two and a half hours. Don't be late."

Will nods, he rushes out of the building and to his car. But not before he fires a text off to Alana, asking her to cover some of his classes, and when she agrees, he emails her his slides and lesson notes. One last message he sends to his closest neighbor, asking her to check on his dogs the next day. He drives home.

His dogs are ecstatic to see him so early in the day, bounding about him. He had made it home quicker than the hour, not having accounted for the lull in traffic during the day. Will strokes them each in turn, pressing kisses to their heads. Their warm bodies give him comfort.

"I will see you soon," he whispers into Buster's fur. He wonders what can of worms he is opening by agreeing to this.

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He is back on the road to his home, surprised that visit had been as short as it was. The office in Minnesota didn't have the facilities that they needed to properly examine the body. His headlights reflect off of something in the road and Will slows the car until he is driving slowly in the shoulder. Will's heart leaps with joy when he sees an abandoned dog walking along the road. It seems fortuitous to have found another stray.

Will is able to coax the dog into the car, using the hotdogs he had bought from 7-11, intended for dinner. It takes a long time, but the exhaustion he had felt has vanished. When the dog finally allows him to grasp ahold of the rope that is dangling from his neck, Will wants to laugh with joy. Instead he carefully lifts the dog into his car and secures it.

Already he feels lighter after the day that he has had. Seeing Elise Nichols displayed on her bed had been difficult and stepping into the mind of the killer had been exhausting. The killer is interesting to Will. He doesn't feel the usual hatred that so often accompanies kills, but there is another emotion that runs just as deep.

He looks at the dog and asks, "What do you want from me?" The dog just stares back at him.

When Will reaches his home he can hear his pack barking in excitement, but he leaves them inside whilst he carefully ties the dog to the porch railing and begins the process of looking after it.

He shaves the matted clumps out of the brown fur until he is able to carefully run a brush through, then leads the stray to a tub to wash him. Despite the dog's initial skittishness, he is patient as Will washes and dries him.

Once he is fully dry, Will places the dog into a kennel and lets out the other dogs, who crowd around Will, happy to see him back. They know that Will won't allow them to approach the kennel, so they don't. He is sipping on whiskey as he says, "Winston. This is everybody. Everybody, this is Winston."

Winston is watching them all with watchful eyes as Will sits down on the porch chair. Buster yips and then Max growls as he stands. Will corrects him and Max lies back down. "Good boy."

The air is warm and Will's heart is eased. He has now accumulated seven strays and it feels right.

Later, Will turns in his bed and is met with Elise Nichols. She looks exactly the way she did when he found her, her dead eyes staring at the ceiling. He reaches out a heavy arm to touch her and then she is being dragged from the bed, mounted on antlers. Darkness swallows her.

He jerks awake, soaked through with sweat. His shirt and underwear cling to him like a second skin as he peels back the damp sheets and climbs out. Pulling the wet fabric off his skin, it falls to the floor with a slap. He goes to his dresser and pulls out fresh clothes,redressing. Will lays down a towel on the bed before he lies back down. He shivers there for long moments, waiting for sleep to reclaim him.

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Will is splashing water on his face, he feels unsettled. He is drying his hands when he senses Crawford enter the men's room and feels his hackles begin to rise. He has to give it to the man; he is determined if nothing else.

Crawford spends moments berating him for seemingly being unstable. Will isn't entirely sure he is stable, but Crawford had asked him to do a job and he will do whatever it takes.

When Jack suggests that the killer loves his girls romantically horror fills Will, because that isn't right. He is almost shouting now. "That's not how he is loving them. He wouldn't

disrespect them that way!" Will pauses to scrub at his face. "He doesn't want these girls to suffer. HE kills them quickly and, to his thinking, with mercy."

Crawford almost chuckles. "The sensitive psychopath. He risked getting caught to tuck Elise Nichols back into bed."

Will feels as though his hands are itching to reach out to something beyond his grasp. "He has to take the next girl soon. He knows he's going to get caught. One way or another."

It's as though the strings have been cut from him and Will feels exhausted. A headache teases at the edges of his vision and he dry-swallows an aspirin. Jack sighs.

"I have an appointment. Meet me in the lab at 3."

Will nods and watches Crawford leave the room before following. He makes his way back to his office. Although he is supposed to have office hours, he hadn't been able to stop anyone from seeking him out throughout the day.

He sits down at the desk and takes out the stack of papers to begin grading them. The essays are fine. Nothing egregious leaps out at Will, almost as if they had been paying attention, though he isn't sure that they do.

At five minutes to 3, Will makes his way deeper into the bowels of Quantico to see the team. They are already in protective equipment and Will pulls on gloves and an apron. It's almost fascinating to watch the three of them dance around each other, like a well-rehearsed ballet.

When Crawford enters the room, Beverly, Price and Zeller unzip the body bag and run them through the evidence, or rather the lack of evidence, they had found.

The presence of a curled shard of metal leads Will to suggest that the killer must work with some sort of metal pipes. It is finally something that they can use on their hunt. The second piece of evidence is the antler velvet in her wounds. When the team confirms that the wounds were inflicted postmortem, Will says, "She was mounted on them. Like hooks. She may have been bled."

The final detail that strikes Will is when Zeller tells them, "Her liver was removed. He took it out and put it back in. See." He's pointing at something. Will instinctively knows that the killer is eating the girls. He still doesn't know why though, and the question haunts him. He has to let them know.

"He's eating them."

The room is silent after that statement. Will has to leave the room, something bouncing round his head. He strips off the gloves and apron and drops them in the relevant bins.

He is almost running back to his office. When he reaches the room he's glad that he has no further lectures that day. After long moments, Will decides that he can do the rest of the grading at home.

Will packs his bag and heads to his car. Each mile away from Quantico makes Will feel lighter, even if there is still something rattling at the back of his brain.

At home, he pours himself some whiskey and settles down to grade the rest of the essays. Crawford texts him a few hours in to state that he wants Will in his office for a meeting at 10. Will sighs, not looking forward to it.

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The next morning Will arrives in Crawford's office and is surprised to see another man already there. He can only see the back of him, can see that his shoulders are broad, even beneath the pale suit jacket he wears.

Crawford motions for Will to sit down in the vacant chair and he does. He pointedly doesn't look at the other man, and instead takes his glasses out of his bag. He perches them on his nose so that he doesn't have to look anyone directly in the eye.

After one brief glance at Will, the other man starts talking again.

"Tell me then, how many confessions?" Will is surprised to hear an accent; it sounds European, possibly Eastern European. His voice is calm and measured and it washes over Will.

Crawford sighs, "Twelve dozen last time I checked.. None of them knew details. Until this morning. Then everyone knew details. Some genius in Duluth PD took a picture of Elise Nichols' body with their phone and shared it with a few close friends. Freddie Lounds ran it on Tattlecrime.com."

"Tasteless." Will can't help the remark.

The man turns toward him in his chair.

"Do you have trouble with taste?"

"My thoughts are often not tasty."

The other man smiles slightly. "Nor mine. No effective barriers."

"I make forts."

"Associations come quickly."

"So do forts."

Will can feel the way that the man is watching him.

"Not fond of eye contact, are you?"

Will almost wants to chuckle, most people are unable to see that.

“Eyes are distracting. You see too much. You don’t see enough. And it’s hard to focus when you’re thinking: those whites are really white, or they must have hepatitis, or is that a burst vein? So I try to avoid eyes whenever possible.”

Will looks into the man’s eyes for a moment and he is sure that he can see a flash of red. He ignores that, sure that it is just his imagination.

“I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present, yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams. No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.”

That strikes a nerve with Will and he feels affronted; it is the first time that someone has been able to describe him in so much detail with so little time.

“Whose profile are you working on?” He turns to Jack, who is watching the two with interest. “Whose profile is he working on?” Jack has the decency to look a little ashamed, but not truly.

“I’m sorry, Will. Observing is what we do. I can’t shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off.”

Will hates the feeling of being ambushed and probed; it reminds him too much of the various doctors and tests his father inflicted on him.

He turns on Crawford. “Please don’t psychoanalyze me. You won’t like me when I’m psychoanalyzed. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have to go give a lecture on psychoanalyzing.”

Scooting out of his chair, Will leaves the office that suddenly feels too small. The other man is unnerving, in his recollection there has never been another person able to see him so clearly. The thought gives him pause as he makes his way to the lecture halls. It’s almost a little intoxicating for someone to cut to his marrow so easily after so little time spent together.

Will puts it out of his mind the minute he steps into the lecture hall.

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He finds himself in Minnesota again; there has been another body. When he reaches the crime scene, the shadow in his mind that feels like the killer is ringing ‘wrong wrong wrong’ like a bell. Everything about this scene is wrong.

The part of him that still feels like Will thinks the presentation is beautiful. The girl is displayed on the severed head of a stag, clearly a trophy for the world to see. It almost looks like she is upon a dinner table and crows are the honored guests for the feast.

Will approaches with Crawford. “I feel like I’m dreaming.”

“The head was reported stolen last night about a mile from here”

“Just the head?”

Price, Zeller and Beverly are all combing the area around the corpse, looking for traces of evidence and stopping every so often to shoo away the crows.

“Minneapolis homicide has already made a statement. They’re calling him the ‘Minnesota Shrike’.” Crawford sounds exasperated; investigations always become more difficult when a name has been mentioned.

“Like the bird?”

Price chimes in to say, “Shrike’s a perching bird. Impales mice and lizards on thorny branches and barbed wire. Rips their organs right out of their bodies. Puts them in a little birdie pantry and eats them later. At its leisure.”

“Sounds about right,” Beverly says as she picks up something from the ground.

“Can’t tell if it’s sloppy or shrewd.”

“He wanted her to be found this way. It’s the homicidal equivalent of fecal smearing. It’s petulant. I almost feel like he’s mocking her.” Will pauses. “Or he’s mocking us.”

“Where did all his love go?”

“Whoever tucked Elise Nichols into bed didn’t paint this picture.”

Zeller looks up from the corpse and says with horror, “He took her lungs. I think she was still alive when he cut them out.”

Will sighs, his head beginning to ache already. Everything about this seems wrong, but it does give him some insight to the killer they had originally been hunting.

“We’re already looking at Minnesota steamfitters and plumbers and people with hunting licences.”

“He has a daughter.” This feels right to Will, the man loves the girls and it seems like the obvious solution. “Same age as the other girls. Same hair color, same eye color, same height, same weight. She’s an only child. She’s leaving home. He can’t stand the thought of losing her. She’s his golden ticket.”

Crawford sighs, “What about the copycat?”

“An intelligent psychopath, particularly a sadist, is hard to catch. There’s no traceable motive. There’ll be no patterns. He may never kill like this again.”

Will stalks away from the scene, ducks under the police tape and adds, “Have Dr. Lecter work up a psychological profile. You seem to be impressed with his opinion.”

He gets into the car and waits out the team completing their observation of the crime scene. Will takes an aspirin to try to abate the mounting headache. Eventually the others get in, and Crawford drives them to the motel Will is staying in, before the rest of the team head back to the airfield.

Once he is inside the room, he strips out of his clothes and collapses into his bed. The room smells so strange and he can almost feel the hundreds of bodies that have been in the bed before him. It makes his skin crawl.

*He is stood underneath the starry sky, looking up, watching the way the stars twinkle. It's almost like he can feel their heat. The air is deathly silent until he hears the crunch of grass near him. He glances over. Something is walking towards him. His eyes focus on the figure and he sees a stag, covered with raven black feathers. On its back there is a man and, though he can't quite make out the face, it reminds him keenly of Hannibal.*

*The stag is almost within touching distance and yet he cannot make out the man's face. It is blacking out the stars so there isn't enough light to discern the features. His breath stops in his throat as he regards them and the stag halts. He and the stag watch each other for long moments, before he looks up into the man's face. The eyes bore into him and call to something in his soul.*

*A knock startles them both and the stag bolts. In its place is a closed door.*

Will jerks awake to the knocking on his door. He grumbles under his breath and gets out of the bed, sure that the knocking at this frankly ungodly hour can only be Crawford. When he opens the door he is shocked to see Hannibal, holding two cups, a thermos, and an insulated bag.

"Good morning, Will. May I come in?"

The request is polite, but dumbfounds Will and he stares at the man for too long before he remembers himself.

"Where's Crawford?"

"Deposed in court. The adventure will be yours and mine today." He pauses and nods his head to the room. "May I come in?"

Will moves aside to allow Hannibal in, who then approaches the small table in the room. Hannibal begins taking out containers out of the bag and pours steaming coffee into the cups. The smells are delicious and Will's stomach grumbles slightly. Knowing that Hannibal probably uses steel flatware, he goes to his bag to fetch his own. Hannibal only quirks an eyebrow at it, but makes no mention of it.

"Iron allergy," Will says as he sits at the table, watching Hannibal serve the scramble. He even sprinkles some chives on top.

"A rare condition," Hannibal replies and sits. "I'm very careful about what I put into my body. Which means I end up preparing most meals myself. A little protein scramble to start

the day. Some eggs, some sausage."

Will spears some on his fork and puts it into his mouth, flavor bursts on his tongue and he has to hold back a moan.

"It's delicious. Thank you," Will says once he has swallowed that first bite. Hannibal is watching him with almost hungry eyes, obviously preening.

"My pleasure." There is a smile twinkling in his eyes, and Will is sure that almost no one would be able to tell.

"I would apologize for my analytical ambush, but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you'll tire of that eventually, so I have to consider using apologies sparingly."

"Just keep it professional," Will says as he takes a sip of the coffee. That too is delicious and he is amazed that Hannibal has been able to manage that.

"Or we could socialize like adults, god forbid we become friendly."

"I don't find you that interesting." That tastes wrong in Will's mouth, but he lets the statement stand, even though it doesn't feel true.

"You will," Hannibal says with a smile. "Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters."

"That's a superstition." Will puts down his fork and adds, "I don't think the Shrike killed that girl in the field."

"The devil's in the details. What didn't your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?"

Will almost laughs as he says, "Everything." He pauses, leaning forward in his seat. "It's like he had to show me a negative so I could see the positive. That crime scene was practically gift-wrapped."

That was what he hadn't been able to put his finger on at the scene, it was almost the exact opposite to the love he had felt in Elise Nichols' room, like it was perfectly crafted to be the other side of the coin for Will to see.

"The mathematics of human behavior. All those ugly variables. Some bad math with this shrike fellow. Are you reconstructing his fantasies? What kind of problems does he have?"

"He has a few."

"Ever have any problems, Will?" If Will didn't know better, he'd think that there had been a wink.

"No." It's not the truth and Hannibal seems to know.

“Of course you don’t. You and I are just alike. Problem free. Nothing about us to feel horrible about.” Hannibal considers the piece of sausage on his fork. “I think Uncle Jack sees you as a fragile little teacup, the finest china used for only special guests.”

That notion is intriguing, “How do you see me?”

“The mongoose I want under the house when the snakes slither by.” Will laughs then. It is the funniest picture, and also flattering. So long people have considered him as fragile, but Hannibal doesn’t and it fills Will with warmth. “Finish your breakfast.”

Will does and once they are finished and the dishes are packed, Hannibal leaves the room to allow Will to shower and change. When he is finished, Will joins Hannibal outside. They get into the car that Will had rented, for it is less flashy than Hannibal’s car. The Bentley is incredibly ostentatious and would stick out when visiting construction sites.

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Will puts the car into park when he reaches the site, catching a glimpse of Hannibal smiling as he unbuckles his seat belt.

“What are you smiling about?”

“Peeking behind the curtain. Curious how the FBI goes about its business when it isn’t kicking in doors.”

He is surprised at how much delight Hannibal seems to take in their situation. Talking to Hannibal is a little like finally being able to hold a conversation for more than a few moments. He challenges Will in a way no one else ever has. He tells Hannibal about their search for pipe threaders.

“Jack Crawford wants me to make sure you’re of sound mind and body to look for metal pipe threaders?”

Will smiles, he can’t help himself. “That’s between you and Crawford.”

“Must be hundreds of construction sites all over Minnesota.”

“Certain kind of metal. Certain kind of pipe. Certain kind of pipe coating. So we’re looking at construction sites that use that kind of pipe.”

“And what are we looking for?”

“At this stage, anything really. But mostly anything peculiar.”

They get out of the car and approach the trailer that obviously houses the office. They enter the building and the secretary is obviously flustered at Will’s request to look through the files, but after a few moments she lets them, though she picks up the phone and dials a number.

Hannibal and Will begin looking through the files, Will looking for something that jumps out at him. Hannibal is looking through them too but Will can feel that Hannibal is occasionally

studying Will.

The secretary is hissing at the other person on the phone, detailing their movements through the office. She seems angry with their presence, but does little to stop them. Will ignores every one of her questions because he has found something: a resignation letter.

“Garret Jacob Hobbs.”

“One of our pipe threaders. Those are all the resignation letters. Plumbers’ Union requires them whenever members finish a job. I’ll call you back.” She puts the phone down and steps to the side of her desk.

Will questions her about Hobbs because Will knows that he has found the right one. When Hannibal asks him why Hobbs had caught his attention, he says that the lack of an address makes him wary.

He turns to the secretary and asks her for an address. She nods slowly and begins searching through the filing cabinet behind her desk, she pulls out a file and hands it to Will. He looks at the information there, making a note of the address before placing the file in one of his boxes.

The three begin taking the boxes out of the office and to Will’s car. Hannibal is handing over the last box to Will over the banister of the stairs and files and papers spill onto the ground.

Without thinking Will says, “I got it.” The woman helps him gather the files and put them back into the box. Hannibal returns to the office. They get the box into his car and Hannibal joins him in the car.

***

Will is leaning against the hood of the car, lights reflecting off of the windows of cars and his glasses, and he looks down at his hands, staring at the blood there. The cacophony of noises around him are dull and all Will can hear is the beating of his heart.

He thinks back to not even 20 minutes earlier. Will isn’t even sure how everything had spiralled so out of control. He can see it in front of him, sees the flashing lights leave the scene.

He and Hannibal arrive at the property, he takes an aspirin, a headache beginning to form between his eyes. He watches as Hannibal unbuckles his seatbelt, Will pauses for a moment before he gets out of the car, Hannibal doesn’t move for long moments.

Approaching the door, Hannibal trailing behind him, then it flies open and a woman is shoved down onto the porch steps. She is wheezing and bleeding freely. Will runs towards her, she must be Louise Hobbs. He watches as she crumples to the floor and he comes to her side.

The blood is in stark contrast to her pale skin and when she grasps at his wrist his entire skin alights with the wrongness of the touch. Her grips smears the crimson fluid on him. A spasm

and then she is dead, her torso and arms covered in wounds. Prying the death grip from his wrist, he stands up and smashes against the front door. It doesn't buckle, so he kicks against the lock until it splinters open.

His gun sits heavy in his hands, burning at his palms, but he ignores it. Will moves through each room until he reaches the kitchen. The man has his daughter with a knife to her throat. She is the spitting image of the girls that have been killed.

"Garret Jacob Hobbs? FBI."

Hobbs doesn't put the knife down and Will's heart is rabbiting in his chest. He slashes at his daughter's throat, she is gasping for breath. Almost as though he is outside his body, he watches as he pulls the trigger, aiming for the man's shoulder. He keeps shooting until Hobbs slumps down against the cabinets. There is so much blood everywhere, but Will throws the gun away, finally able to get the burning metal away from his hands.

He crouches down, into the rapidly spreading pool of the girl's blood. The cut is deep and her blood is spurting out with each beat of her heart. He forces himself through the revulsion of touching someone and clasps his hands around her neck, trying to stem the flow of blood.

There is a wheezing rasp from Hobbs and he looks up to see the man smiling at him. "See? See?" He rasps to Will, he cannot break eye contact. Will feels himself begin to shut down, feeling the way that life is leaking away from Abigail.

Then Hannibal is kneeling down on the other side of the girl, his hands brush Will's out of the way, to clasp her neck in his bigger hand. The touch shouldn't feel good, but it does, it's so shockingly good that for a moment heat fills Will. Then he hears Hobbs make a final death rattle, Abigail is watching her father die, and Will can't stop it from happening.

He wants Hannibal's hands on him again. That is the only thing he can think about as he takes out his cell phone and calls emergency services. Hannibal is the only sure thing in that room, he seems so calm and possessed and Will cannot think about anything else.

It takes mere minutes before police and ambulances arrive at the scene. Will watches as Hannibal gives directions to the men as they treat Abigail. For an absurd moment Will wants to follow the orders too. Standing slowly, he makes his way outside and begins to explain what happened to the police officers there. His cell phone rings and Jack is calling him, he gives answers to questions he cannot remember.

Perched on the edge of one of the police cruisers, he watches as Hannibal goes into the ambulance with Abigail, who is still alive, and Will is filled with wonder at the man. He had been able to save a life so easily.

Will rubs at his eyes. His hands are still sore except the places where Hannibal had touched him. He can still hear Hobbs' final words. "See?" Will isn't sure what it meant.

Then a police officer offers to drive him to the motel so that he can change and go home. He receives a text saying that Abigail would stay in a local hospital before being transported to Baltimore once she is stable. Will decides then that he will stay until she does.

Reaching the motel, Will strips out of his bloodied clothes. He feels overheated, like his skin is too small for him. The areas where Hannibal had brushed against him are the only places that feel right.

Once he is showered and changed he orders a taxi, local police had said that they would return the car to the rental agency, so he is without a vehicle for the time being. Will reaches the hospital and follows the corridors until he finds Abigail's room. She is connected to various beeping machines with wires and tubes snake into her veins to replenish her blood. Will is shocked to see Hannibal sat in one of the chairs, his hand outstretched to hold one of Abigail's. Something warm curls in Will's chest at the image of comfort Hannibal is offering. Hannibal is asleep and Will carefully sits down in the empty chair at Abigail's other side. This room feels safe, like a bubble with just the three of them, as though they are a family.

# Chapter 2

Will hates that Jack orders him to go to Hannibal for therapy, adamant that therapy doesn't work on him. But Jack insists that it isn't just a formality and he wants to make sure that Will is okay. It rankles something in Will, the care from Jack feels wrong and sits too heavy in him, stifling.

Alana encourages him and states that it's just a conversation, so Will finds himself sat in Hannibal's waiting room. He wants to desperately fidget with the cushions on the couch but he doesn't, afraid to mess with the order in the room. He glances instead at the art that is hung in the waiting room. It is surprisingly macabre for a psychiatrist's office a mixture of different styles and origins, but Will thinks it suits what he knows about Hannibal so far.

The door opens and Will almost jumps to his feet. Hannibal has a smile that tugs at the corners of his mouth and it makes Will feel warm. He follows Hannibal into the room and while Hannibal approaches his desk, Will clambers up the ladder to look at the rows of books, though only after a questioning look to Hannibal, who nods.

This room feels even more like Hannibal; it is muted grays with flashes of red that lie in sharp contrast to everything else. Will hears the ruffle of paper and turns to look down at Hannibal. This position doesn't feel quite right, but after decades of never feeling 'quite right', Will ignores it.

"What's that?"

"Your psychological evaluation. You're totally functional and more or less sane. Well done."

Will almost wants to chuckle. "Did you just rubber stamp me?"

"Jack Crawford may lay his wary head to rest knowing he didn't break you and our conversation can proceed unobstructed by paperwork."

Will considers this as he studies Hannibal. "Jack thinks I need therapy."

"What you need is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there."

The statement is striking; so simple and yet it cuts to the core of the issue.

"Last time he sent me into a dark place I brought something back."

"A surrogate daughter?"

Will can't explain the deep longing that shoots through him at that suggestion, he had never seen himself as a parental figure and yet now that it is close, he yearns for it. He almost wants to argue against it, but Hannibal continues.

“You saved Abigail Hobbs’ life. You also orphaned her. It comes with certain emotional obligations, regardless of empathy disorders.”

“You were there. You saved her life too. Do you feel obligated?”

“I feel a staggering amount of obligation. I feel responsibility. I’ve fantasized about scenarios where my actions may have allowed a different fate for Abigail Hobbs.”

The implication there thrills and frightens Will in equal measure, the sense of familiarity and camaraderie with Hannibal is dizzying.

“Jack thinks Abigail Hobbs might have helped her dad kill those girls.”

Hannibal is silent for long moments. “How does that make you feel?”

Will almost wants to laugh at the phrase straight out of a psychiatry textbook, so he turns the question back to Hannibal. “How does it make *you* feel?” Another smile flashes in Hannibal’s eyes before he sobers.

“I find it vulgar.”

“Me too.”

“And entirely possible.”

Will almost shakes his head. “It’s not what happened.”

“Jack will ask her when she wakes up, or he’ll have one of us ask her.”

“Is this therapy or a support group?”

“It’s whatever you need it to be. Will, the mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself and not the worst of someone else.”

He almost wants to deny that, not sure that there is a best of himself, but he lets the suggestion rest heavy in his mind.

Hannibal is gazing up at him and Will cannot take his eyes off the man.

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The image of Hobbs does not leave his mind, so when he sees Hannibal again he hands back the psychological evaluation. “This may have been premature.”

“What did you see? Out in the field?”

“Hobbs.”

“An association?”

“A hallucination. I saw him lying there, in someone else’s grave.”

“Did you tell Jack what you saw?”

“No.”

Hannibal seems to consider this for long moments.

“It’s stress. Not worth reporting. The mechanism that distinguishes conscious perceptions from internal perceptions misfired. You displaced the victim of another killer's crime with what could arguably be considered your victim.”

“I don’t consider him my victim.”

“What do you consider him?”

“Dead.”

Hannibal smiles. “Is it harder imagining the thrill somebody else feels killing now that you’ve done it yourself?”

“Yes.” This garners an even bigger smile, it warms Will again.

“The arms. Why did he leave them exposed? To hold their hands? Feel the life leaving their body?”

This feels more comfortable, discussing a case with Hannibal. Will feels like that with Hannibal he is able to fully discuss the details and sound out his thoughts to someone who can understand the places his mind goes. Hannibal offers him insights and thoughts that stretch Will further along his own path.

“Maybe he admires their ability to connect the way human minds can’t.”

“Yours can.”

Will sighs and rubs at his temple. “Not physically. Not with reciprocity.”

Will clambers back down the ladder and into the room, where Hannibal is watching him with keen eyes.

“I believe our hour is up, Will,” Hannibal says gently. Will hates the reminder, but he nods.

“Thanks, Dr Lecter.”

“Hannibal, please,” he says with a smile. “I have another appointment this evening, but would you care to join me for dinner another evening?”

Will is shocked at the invitation. “Is that advisable? Wouldn’t it be breaking some sort of ethical code.”

“As I’ve said before, Will. We are merely having conversations.”

“That the FBI is paying you money for.”

“And nothing we talk about makes its way back to Jack. We are not beholden to FBI rules.”

“I will consider it,” Will says after a moment. He wants to acquiesce, but he is also cautious about any new connection to another person.

“That is all I ask, I feel myself moved to present a feast if you agree.”

Will can feel a blush rising in his cheeks and he ducks his head to avoid looking at Hannibal.

“I will speak to you soon.” Will says as he leaves the office out of a different door to which he came in. It’s something he is glad for, not sure if he could face seeing another person about to speak to Hannibal. He feels oddly protective of his time with Hannibal, wants to guard it almost jealously.

“Yes, you will.” Hannibal says with a smile. “Oh, and Will, Abigail has been moved to Hopkins.”

Will nods and thinks about Hannibal’s admission that he felt protective and paternal over her. He imagines that Hannibal would make a good father, strict but fair. The thought strikes him as odd, not usually making a habit of imagining people he knows as parents.

“Goodbye, Will.” Hannibal says as he shuts the door behind Will.

***

It’s obvious once he is in the evidence lab with the team that the man they’re looking for is a pharmacist or doctor, as he has to be able to change a prescription in order to force a hyperglycemic coma and then ketoacidosis death.

They find him almost too easily; a pharmacist that travels all over the county is like a glaring red flag that says, “It’s me you’re looking for.” When they reach the pharmacy he is working at that evening, he is already gone.

Reading Lounds’ article about him stings; if he didn’t know better he would think that Hannibal had spoken to her, but he thinks that can’t be the case. He wants to get into his car and drive home, but something stops him and instead he drives to John Hopkins.

He finds himself in Abigail’s room, almost like he is a moth being drawn to a flame. Will wonders whether he is drawn to her because of his actions or whether it’s because he can’t quite shake Hobbs from his head. Deciding not to draw to further conclusions, he sits down on the sofa in her room. He feels exhausted.

*Will can hear hoofbeats and he gets out of his seat. Sees a glimpse of the raven-feathered stag walking through the halls of the hospital. Follows it down the hallways, but no one can see him or the stag.*

*The stag turns a corner and he follows. When he comes around the corner they are no longer in the hospital. Instead, it looks like a clearing with a table decked for a feast. The stag pauses next to a chair to the right of the head of the table. Only the head of the table and the seat beside the stag are empty. Knowing that he has to sit, he does.*

*He looks around him and the faces he sees are not familiar, yet Will feels safe. He glances up to the seat opposite him. It's Abigail and she is smiling at him, happy tears in her eyes. "Hello, Papa," she whispers, and Will smiles back, heart singing with happiness.*

*As one, the table stands and so does Will. "Your King," a voice says from nowhere.*

*A figure approaches the head of the table and Will can't make out the face, but he can feel the eyes trained on him. Their gaze feels hungry.*

*The figure raises a goblet and toasts Will with the words, "My Queen." The voice is so achingly familiar that Will is sure he has heard it before.*

Will wakes to see Alana sitting on the edge of Abigail's bed reading quietly. A blanket is covering him. Carefully, he pushes it off and sits up. He feels protective of Abigail, like Alana shouldn't be there. They discuss Alana's reluctance to spend time with him. Will thinks that if he were more normal, Alana would be someone he could consider dating.

Alana stands and says, "I have to get back to Georgetown."

"Okay, I will stay here."

"Keeping vigil?"

"She needs to know she still has someone."

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He steps out of an elevator, wanting to find something to eat in the cafetaria. His cell phone rings his pocket.

"Hello?"

"Will, have you got eyes on Abigail Hobbs?"

"Not at this moment, why?"

"It's Stammets, he's after Abigail."

Will hangs up and stuffs the cell phone back into his pocket, then draws his gun and checks the chamber as he runs towards Abigail's room.

The room is empty, no Abigail and no Stammets, and his heart and mind are racing as he races back into the hallway. He snags a nurse and demands, "Where is she? Abigail Hobbs. The girl in that room. Where is she?"

"They took her for tests."

"Who took her?" The nurse shakes her head. " *Who took her?* "

The nurse stammers and Will decides that he won't get an answer out of her so he sprints down the hall and up a flight of stairs. He finds Stammets pushing Abigail's gurney towards the elevator at the end of the hallway. Stammets startles when he hears Will and he moves, but Will raises his gun. He aims for the very center of Stammets, but then decides against it and aims for the shoulder and fires.

Stamets is propelled backwards by the impact, his gun clattering to the floor. Will pushes Abigail out of the way and kicks the gun out of Stammets' reach when he goes for the fallen weapon.

"What were you going to do with her?"

"We evolved from mycelium. Only reintroducing her to the concept." Stammets is clearly in shock, his breathing hard.

"By burying her alive?"

"Opisthokontum. A super kingdom of animalia and fungi together. That journalist said you understood me."

"I don't."

"You would have." He takes a pained breath. "Walk into a field of mycelium, they know you're there. Their spores reach for you when you pass by. I know who you're reaching for. You should have let me plant her. You would have found her in a field where she could finally reach back."

Will watches Stammets writhing in pain. The hallway filling with hospital staff investigating the source of the gunfire.

"You should know I'm a terrible shot. I was trying to kill you."

When Stammets is arrested, he goes to his standing appointment with Hannibal. This time he is sat opposite Hannibal.

Hannibal asks him if he saw Hobbs and Will answers him truthfully. He hadn't, but still it seems odd that he was able to kill Hobbs so easily and yet had been unable to kill Stammets. Hannibal is able to tease out of him that he had wanted to prove to himself that he had been exhilarated by saving Abigail and not killing Hobbs

"I should have stuck to fixing boat motors in Louisiana."

"A boat engine is a machine. A predictable problem, easy to solve. You fail, there's a paddle. Where was your paddle with Hobbs?"

"You're supposed to be my paddle." The statement makes him feel warm, as though he is hoping for something, but he isn't sure what he wants.

"I am." Relief makes him feel almost weak. "It wasn't the act of killing Hobbs that got you down, was it? Did you really feel so bad because killing him felt so good?"

Will weighs that question for long moments before he admits, “I liked killing Hobbs.”

A rare smile graces Hannibal’s features and Will suddenly finds himself desperate to see the smile again.

“Killing must feel good to God too. He does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?”

“Depends who you ask.”

“God’s terrific. He dropped a church roof on 34 of his worshippers last Wednesday night in Texas, while they sang a hymn.”

“Did God feel good about that?”

“He felt powerful.”

Will considers that the entire way home. He finds himself desperate to win Hannibal’s approval as soon as possible. He wonders what he can do to make it so. Hannibal is difficult to read; other people Will is able to discern within minutes, but Hannibal is so wonderfully blank that Will feels like he has never known himself more than when he is with Hannibal.

***

Will steps out onto his porch in his boxers and t-shirt, letting the dogs out to relieve themselves. They stream out after him and toward the driveway, which is when Will realises he is not alone. Alana is stepping out of her car and she smiles at him.

“Morning.”

“I didn’t hear you drive up.” He says it almost accusingly.

“Hybrid. Good car for stalking.”

“I’m compelled to go cover myself.”

“I have brothers.”

“I’ll put on a robe just the same. Do you want a cup of coffee? And more importantly, why are you here?” He turns back to the house.

“Yes. And Abigail Hobbs woke up.”

Will freezes. “You know how to bury the lead.”

“Want me to get you a cup of coffee?”

“No, I want to get my coat.” Will wants to drive to see Abigail, to see her and make sure that she is okay.

Alana steers him back into the house, not taking a no for an answer, so he still leads her to the kitchen, where she busies herself with the stove-top kettle while he goes to get dressed.

Once that's done, he sits at the kitchen table with Alana and sips at the tea she has made. His cell is ringing on the table, Jack's name flashing up each time it rings. Then it stops abruptly. They discuss seeing Abigail and Jack's goal to confirm that she had been the lure for his father's victims.

Alana does not want that to happen, and although she so clearly pities Will, she is also fiercely protective of him. "I don't want to get in the middle of you and Jack, but if I can be helpful to you as a buffer..."

"I like you as a buffer. I also like the way you rattle Jack. He respects you too much to yell at you, no matter how much he wants to." Will thinks that Hannibal is the same, he is not easily intimidated by anyone, least of all Jack, and he is able to disarm the man so easily.

"And I take advantage of that."

Will lets that stew for a moment, but he wants to steer Alana away from that avenue of conversation.

"Abigail Hobbs doesn't have anyone."

"You can't be her everyone. Don't have to draw a line, but you might want to know where your line is?"

Will feels as though he should be her everything, feels like he owes her that at least. The paternal longing he has is so present in his mind at all times. Wll knows that it is unlikely that she wants another father figure and especially not one that was responsible for her father's death. But he can't help wanting to offer it to her.

Alana shocks him when she says, "Dogs keep a promise a person can't." That stings a little.

"I'm not collecting another stray." This is different. And Will isn't sure how he can prove that to Alana. She tells him that she hadn't meant it as insulting as it sounds. He doesn't know why, but he has to soothe her embarrassment. "I get it. I can trust a dog to be a dog, but I can't trust Abigail to be who I think she is."

"The first person Abigail talks to about what happened can't be anyone who was there when it happened. That means no Dr Lecter either."

"Much less the guy who killed Dad."

"Let me reach out to her my own way."

Will nods and then Alana heads out, leaving Will to ponder Abigail. He wants to see her, he knows that much. But he is willing to wait until she is fully awake.

***

He is lecturing, flicking through the photos on the slides. He tells them about Hobbs' victims, their faces eager as he watches them. But the purpose of his lecture isn't Hobbs. It is, after all, a closed case.

A picture of Cassie Boyle impaled on the antlers of a severed stag head appears on the screen, her death a grotesque work of art. And Will does think the way Cassie had been displayed was beautiful, in a distinctly macabre way.

Will looks around the room as he speaks and is struck by how young they all are, eager to learn and please. Then he sees Jack and Hannibal standing in the hallway, just behind the edge of the tiered seats.

He is struck by the look in Hannibal's eyes: he looks awed.

The sentiment in Hannibal's gaze turns sharper somehow as Will speaks. An image of Abigail and her father flashes up on the screen.

"How intimately did he know Garret Jacob Hobbs? Did he appreciate him from afar, or did he engage him? Did he ingratiate himself into Hobbs' life? Did Hobbs know his copy cat as he knew him?"

The final image is of Hobbs slumped dead in his kitchen.

"I believe the as-yet unidentified caller was our copy cat killer."

Hannibal catches his eyes and he looks so proud of Will that it sends a fissure of warmth through him, desperate for Hannibal's approval.

***

They drive to the psychiatric hospital where Abigail is staying, not sure what they will find when they get there. They don't speak much on the drive, but Will enjoys the easy silence that they keep. It is just like the fateful drive they had made together in Minnesota.

When they arrive, they are led to the room, the orderlies informing them that a red-headed woman was speaking to Abigail, which sours Will's mood. He despises the woman; she is dogged but also terribly invasive.

"Speak of the devil," she says when they enter the room.

"Would you excuse us please?" Will says to her, and she looks at Abigail before looking back at Will.

"I'm not leaving you alone with her." Will wants to sigh but instead he nods to the orderlies and they flank her to take her out of the room.

"I'm Special Agent Will Graham," he says to Abigail instead.

As Freddie is forced out of the room she says, "By Special Agent, he means not really an Agent. He didn't get past the screening process." She looks directly at Will as she says, "Too

unstable."

"I must insist you leave the room," Hannibal says.

Before she leaves, she offers Abigail a business card "If you want to talk-" Will snatches the card without saying a word and Freddie lets herself be led out of the room.

"Abigail, this is Doctor Lecter. Do you remember us?"

She looks at Will for long moments. "I remember you." She searches Will's face for something. "You killed my dad."

It isn't a question and the statements hangs in the air. Hannibal speaks up, "You've been in a bed for 3 weeks, Abigail. Why don't we have a walk?"

She nods and they leave her alone to get dressed. They wait outside until she leaves the room, unsteady on her legs, like a newborn foal. Hannibal and Will flank her and support her into the gardens.

It strikes Will then that they are a family unit.

They lead her to a seat and she sits gratefully. Will sits down next to her, Hannibal at his shoulder, and his presence feels grounding. Will says, "I'm sorry we couldn't save your mother. We did everything we could, but she was already gone."

Tears threaten to spill from her eyes, but they don't.

"I know. I saw him kill her."

"You saw it?" Hannibal asks.

"It was sort of like seeing it."

"There was no vocabulary for your mind to articulate the violence."

"Didn't seem real. He was loving right up until the second he wasn't. He kept telling me he was sorry and to just hold still. He was going to make it all go away."

Will wants to comfort her. "There was plenty wrong with your father, Abigail, but there's nothing wrong with you. You said he was loving. I believe it. That's what you brought out in him."

"It's not all I brought out in him."

"Did he tell you about the young women he murdered?" Hannibal asks, he sounds much calmer than Will feels.

Abigail falls silent and Will sends Hannibal a reproachful look.

"You don't have to answer that right now, if you don't want to."

“But we will have to ask you those questions eventually.”

“I’m going to be messed up, aren’t I? I’m worried about nightmares.”

Hannibal smiles warmly. “We’ll help you with the nightmares.”

“There’s no such thing as getting used to what you experienced. It bothers me a lot. I can only imagine how it bothers you when I see it over and over in my mind.” He pauses. “I worry about nightmares, too.”

“Do you have nightmares about killing my dad?”

“Sometimes it’s hard for me to dream about much else.”

“Killing somebody, even if you have to do it, it feels that bad?”

“Ugliest thing in the world.”

Will catches Hannibal’s eye; they both know that he is not telling the truth to Abigail.

Abigail glances at Will and considers his words.

“I want to go home.” She sounds like a child and Will’s heart breaks a little.

They return Abigail to her room after a few more moments and then make their way back to Hannibal’s car. The shocking red of Freddie’s hair stands out in stark contrast. She is leant against the hood of the car and Will can feel Hannibal tense beside him.

Freddie straightens when she sees them approach.

Freddie tries to play nice with them. It is clearly an attempt at trying to find an angle that means she has an in with the team. It would help her ad sales, of that Will has no doubt. But he doesn’t want her talking to Abigail. Freddie has always been a vulture more concerned with getting the scoop than portraying people fairly.

Will sighs. “Miss Lounds, it’s not very smart to piss of a guy who thinks about killing people for a living.”

Next to him Hannibal sighs, but Will knows that the man is amused at him.

***

The visit to the Hobbs’ residence proceeds without a hitch until they are interrupted by Abigail’s friend and Cassie Boyle’s brother. Hannibal seems a little restless, but Will chalks it up to the odd atmosphere in the house.

Will goes back to a motel and falls into a restless sleep.

*He is holding Abigail in his arms and the stag is watching them. Will presses a kiss to her forehead. “My darling girl,” he whispers and she smiles at him.*

*“Papa,” she says admonishingly.*

*He is wearing a long gown and a crown of flowers adorns both their heads. A figure approaches them, stopping next to the stag to brush a hand over its head. The stag huffs and Will smiles.*

*“Hello, my love,” the figure says, and warmth suffuses Will. He releases Abigail, who smiles at him knowingly, and walks to the figure. He is gathered in strong arms, surrounded by the figure’s smell. It smells like home and comfort. “How is our daughter?” the figure asks.*

*Will smiles up at the figure, drowning in maroon eyes. “She is well. I’m scared she is going to leave us soon.”*

*“Oh my darling, there is no need to worry.” A hand snakes down to Will’s belly and strokes over the swell there. “We’ll have another soon.”*

*Will feels butterflies beneath his skin where the figure is touching him, and his heart is full. He tilts his head up for a kiss.*

The sound of the alarm wrenches him from the dream and he wakes drenched in sweat. Will tries to shake the dream, but it felt so vivid and he touches his stomach, though it is flat. And yet he feels this yearning in him.

He wonders if he should mention the dream to Hannibal.

Will is showered and dressed by the time that Hannibal's car is waiting in the motel parking lot. He gets into the car and smiles at Hannibal.

“Sleep well?” Hannibal asks him.

Will makes, what he hopes is, a non-committal sound.

“Nightmares?”

“Surprisingly no.”

“Dreams are merely our mind’s way of processing what is happening to us during the day.”

“I’m not really sure what my dream last night could possibly mean.”

“Care to share?” Hannibal looks at him expectantly.

“No.”

Hannibal smiles again. “Feel no pressure to share anything. We are merely having conversations.”

Will flushes, not used to a therapist not forcing him to share things. Usually they would pry until Will left.

“What do you dream about?”

Hannibal chuckles as he puts the car into drive. “Oh I assure you, it is quite mundane.”

“How evasive,” Will says with a wry smile.

“I promise, it is nothing more than simply dreaming about family.”

“Your parents?”

“No. I dream about my own: a loving spouse and a baby.”

Will is silent for long moments. “I dream about that too.”

“Is it a good dream?”

“It’s the happiest I’ve ever felt.”

“Mine make me happy too.”

They pass the rest of the drive in comfortable silence.

***

The victim sat at the head of Turner family’s table is breaking his heart. An ache sits heavy inside him, and his hands itch with the need to touch his abdomen. He fights the urge and instead tries to get inside the head of this killer.

It’s difficult because everything in him rebels against it. How could someone hate a family this much?

“What do you see, Will?” Jack’s voice breaks him out of his reverie.

“Family values.”

“Whose family values?”

Will shakes his head.

He stands to look at the family photographs and Jack joins him. He tells Will about the Turner family and their missing son. Will is sure that the search had been extensive; they always are for families like this one.

“When misery rains, she pours.” Jack sighs.

The statement is a direct antithesis of all the smiling faces in the photos that adorn the walls and mantelpiece.

“Holidays, vacations, milestones, never reveal the full picture.”

“Who wants to fill their scrapbook with arguments and dirty laundry?”

“False faces in family portraits. Layers and layers of lies betrayed by a sad glint in a child’s eyes.” It makes him feel bitter and his thoughts turn again to having a family of his own. Something that he hadn’t thought about until spending time with Hannibal and Abigail.

The team discusses the ballistics and evidence they have found so far. Will listens with half an ear, but spends more time looking at the photos.

While they talk, Will picks up a photo of Mrs Turner and her missing son. She is holding him tight, pressing a kiss to his forehead.

“Those elevated termination points match what I see on these bodies.” Zeller moves toward the table to indicate what he means. “Angled cranial impacts, coupled with acute exit wounds and conical spray. The shooter was firing from low to high, probably crouched.”

“Or maybe they were Hobbits.” Price is joking but something strikes a chord with Will. He looks at the photos again.

“How long since Jesse was abducted?”

“Just over a year.”

Will considers the possibility all the way to the evidence lab in Quantico.

When the bodies are all laid out in the morgue. Jack is facing them like the head of a family demanding answers. Will knows he is apart from this family.

“I’m glad we didn’t have guns in my house. I would’ve shot my sisters to get them out of the bathroom,” Zeller says after a moment as he moves through the room.

“I liked having a big family” Beverly counters.

Price laughs as he says, “My parents gave me a gift. A twin. Who wouldn’t want two of me?”

Zeller looks at Will as he says, “Must’ve been an only child.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Family friction is a catalyst for personality development.” There is a note of petulance in Zeller’s voice.

The comment stings a little and Beverly seems to notice as she swoops in, “I was the oldest, so all the friction rolled down hill.”

Family dynamics are argued between them, each of them has a different dynamic and so they have differing views. But it feels wrong somehow. As much as he likes the group, they are not who he wants to discuss family with. As before, his thoughts turn to Hannibal and Abigail whenever family is mentioned.

Jack is looking at the crime scene photos as he looks at each body. “All of the victims have defensive wounds. Except for Mrs.Turner.” He hands the photo to Will.

“There’s acceptance in her body position. Forgiveness, even.”

Will knows then that he has missed something that Jack didn’t.

“What kind of victim forgives her killer at the moment of her death?” Jack prods him.

Will can’t take his eyes off of Mrs. Turner. “A mother.” He feels something in him tug at the feeling.

***

“Tell me about your mother.”

Will chuckles, “That’s some lazy psychiatry, Dr Lecter. Low hanging fruit.”

“I suspect that fruit is on a high branch, very difficult to reach.”

“So’s my mother. I never knew her.”

“An interesting place to start.”

“Tell me about your mother. Let’s start there. Quid pro quo.”

Hannibal seems to enjoy his use of Latin.

“Both my parents died when I was very young. The proverbial orphan until I was adopted by my Uncle Robertas when I was 16.”

Will considers this and feels like he understands Hannibal a little more clearly.

“You have orphan in common with Abigail.”

“I think we’ll discover you and I have a great deal in common with Abigail. She’s already demonstrated an aptitude for the psychological.” He is looking at Will. “Quid pro quo.”

Will ignores the attempt at volleying with Hannibal.

“There’s something so foreign about family. Like an ill-fitting suit. Never connected to the concept.”

“You created a family for yourself.”

“I created a pack of strays. Thanks for feeding them while I was away.”

Hannibal inclines his head as if to say ‘you’re welcome’.

“I was referring to Abigail Hobbs.” He gives Will a moment to get used to the idea. “Tell me about the Turner family. Were they affluent? Well to do?”

“They lived like they had money.”

“Did your family have money, Will?”

“We were poor. I followed my father from the boat yards in Biloxi and Greenville to lake boats on Erie.”

“Always the new boy at school? Always the stranger?”

“Yes.”

“Harboring a half-buried grudge against the rich?”

“Aren’t we all,” Will says with a laugh.

“What grudge was Mrs Turner’s killer harboring against her?”

“Motherhood,” Will says slowly, the concept is still tugging at something in him that he can’t quite identify.

“Not motherhood, a perversion of it.”

***

Will dismisses his class when he sees Jack. They hang around for a bit, but leave when he tells them to.

“You’re making it difficult to provide an education, Jack.”

Jack tells him that they had found a print at the scene that had matched another missing kid. The kid’s family constellation is almost identical to the Turners. Realisation dawns on him. “Oh god.”

“We’re ready when you are. And you’re ready right now. Let’s go.”

When they arrive at the Frist house, it is decorated for the holidays. Burl Ives is playing throughout the house. It is so unseasonal that it jars Will slightly. Someone stops the player and the house is silent.

There in the living room, the presents beneath the tree have been shredded as though by a pack of wild animals. Will is certain that it is instead the group of children that have been at the center of these murders.

The family is dead. That much is obvious from the smell in the room and the discolouration of their pallor. They are all dressed in pyjamas and robes, clearly ready to spend Christmas morning as a family.

A dog trots out from behind the Christmas tree, carrying a chewed off arm. It drops the limb at Will’s feet.

“Merry Christmas, everyone,” Will says to the team.

Zeller crouches down next to the body of Mr Frist, his throat partially eaten. “At least the dog didn’t starve.”

The bodies are transported to the morgue and the team gathers again to examine them.

So much of this scene feels so similar to the first. But there are some noticeable differences. The wounds on her body had been different and a fifth body had been found. The body had been burnt to a crisp. Will knows that it is the missing Connor Frist.

When Zeller confirms that the first wound on Mrs Frist had not killed her, but caused her to go into shock. He can see it in his head, Connor panicking and unsure what to do. It would have been difficult to kill his mother in the first place, but to see her suffer would have been traumatizing. Then someone else had intervened to kill Mrs Frist.

“Connor couldn’t put his panic back in the bottle. So he was shot too.”

Will sighs. “In anger. By a different gun. With a larger caliber. A gun that wasn’t used in the Turner house where everything went as planned.”

Beverly moves over to the burnt corpse and pulls a charred feather from his skull. She looks at it closely.

“Goose down. There was a pillow under his head.”

Jack looks puzzled, but says, “Connor Frist is murdered because he can’t bring himself to finish off his mother, but afterwards he’s treated with compassion and given a ceremonial send-off to the hereafter.”

“Whoever shot him, disowned him.”

***

Hannibal opens the door to the waiting room and Will looks up at him. “Good evening. Please come in.”

Will follows him into the room. He throws a gift bag onto the couch and it slides open. He sits down on his usual chair.

Hannibal glances at the bag. “Has Christmas come early? Or late?”

He stares for a moment, trying to shake off the image of the Frist house. “It was for Abigail.”

“Was?”

“Thought better of it. Wasn’t thinking clearly. I was upset when I bought it. Maybe still am.”

“You bear gifts when you’re angry?”

“Better gifts than teeth.” Hannibal smiles at that, clearly delighted by the statement.

“What is it?”

“Magnifying glass. Fly tying gear.”

“Teaching her to fish. Her father taught her how to hunt.”

“That’s why I thought better of it.”

“Feeling paternal, Will?” Will again feels that ache in him, his hand twitches towards his stomach.

“Aren’t you?” he asks.

“Yes. Our good friend Dr Bloom has advised against taking too personal an interest in Abigail’s welfare. You break it, you bought it.”

“Can’t break what’s already broken.”

“Can’t you?” Hannibal considers Will. “Tell me. Why were you so angry?”

“I’m angry about these boys. I’m angry cause I know when I find them, I can’t help them. I can’t give them back what they gave away.”

“Family.”

“Yes.” Will actually touches his stomach then, Hannibal notices but doesn’t comment.

“Freddie Lounds has coined these young killers the Blood Brothers.”

“We call them the Lost Boys.”

“Abigail is lost, too. Perhaps it is our responsibility, yours and mine, to help her find her way.” Will wants that more than anything. Grateful that Hannibal and he have their relationship to Abigail in common. It almost feels like they have created a family unit.

***

Beverly finds him pouring over the files of the boys and their families. There is so much overlap between them, most notably their size. Both are small for their age. It could make for an easy target to whoever is choosing these boys. Beverly tells him that they had found a ballistics match so he follows her to Jack’s office. Jack is certain that the older person who is manipulating these boys is CJ Lincoln. Will doesn’t agree but he decides not to argue with Jack in this instance.

He has a lecture to give so Jack lets him go, telling him that he will be called back when they have found any murders that might resemble the ones they already know about. Will knows that there will be more.

A few hours later he is back in the office. A map is displayed on the board, along with photos of boys they think might be involved in the killings.

Jack pushes a pin into the map.

“Bangor, Maine. Stamford, Connecticut. And most recently, Reston, Virginia.” Jack says with obvious resignation.

“That places each of the murders approximately 500 miles from the one before it.” Price seems sure of the pattern.

Zeller sighs, “You’re trying to attach a geographical pattern to murders that took place weeks apart.”

“Other patterns too. Our shooters are minors. Middle children from traditional affluent families,” Will says in answer.

“They’re not travelling by Greyhound,” Beverly adds.

“I drove my dad’s car when I was 14,” Price counters.

“They’re moving southbound, we’re looking somewhere on the border of Georgia and North Carolina.” Jack says as he circles the area on the map.

Zeller is exasperated as he says, “There’s hundreds of towns in this area. Off every freeway ramp.”

“Got a better idea?”

“Throw darts,” Zeller quips, but shrinks in his seat as Jack shoots him a withering look.

“There’s a pattern. Less to do with geography than psychology.”

“What kind of kid would do this?” Jack asks.

“And what kind of kid would follow a kid who did this?”

“The shepherd and his flock,” Beverly muses.

“When a sheep ran away, the shepherd used to break its leg to keep it from running away again. It forced the sheep to rely on the shepherd,” Price states after a moment.

“Cruel to be kind.”

“Animals remember the voice of a trusted, familiar person. They also remember people who inflict abuse on them.”

“There’s no indication these kids came from abusive families.”

“Capture-bonding. A passive psychological response to a new master. It’s been an essential survival tool for millions of years. Bond with your captor, you survive. Don’t, you’re breakfast.”

Jack looks around the room and says, “Get files on every missing boy within 200 miles of North Carolina.”

***

Alana and Beverly are helping him look through the 14 files of missing kids in the area Jack had suggested. It is exhausting; so many of these boys remind Will of himself. He had been the small child that so many ignored, always a little ways apart from everyone else. When he throws away the file he is holding Alana says, “Would’ve been a perfect candidate.”

“I would have.” Will looks at the next file in his hand and tosses it aside. “He’d have hobbies that require hand-eye coordination, that are off the beaten path, that link up to what his father does for a living. Something that consumes him so as to keep him engaged.”

“The devil makes work for idle hands, and all that,” Beverly adds.

She is holding a file in a hand, “Here’s one. Family moved from Biloxi, to Charleston to Fayetteville in the last three years. He won the Junior High award for his work on pretty sophisticated computer circuitry.”

“Chris O’Halloran.”

“Why do you think these kids are susceptible to C.J. Lincoln?” Alana asks.

“Because he may have a brother, but their ages or interests set them apart. A brother without a brother.”

“Brothers looking for a mother,” Alana muses.

That strikes Will and he rushes towards Jack’s office. When he enters Jack looks up from his computer. “It’s not just C.J. Lincoln. There’s an adult with some formative sway. It’s a woman. A mother figure. She’s looking to form a family.”

“Family can have a contagion effect on the alienated. You adopt the same attitudes, the same behaviors.”

“I never got bit by that bug.” That isn’t entirely true, but Will doesn’t want to discuss that he has been thinking about family more and more since meeting Hannibal.

Jack asks him for the location of the O’Halloran family, then springs into action to get the team there.

***

He chases after Chris O’Halloran, a SWAT member raises his gun to fire at the boy, but Will shouts, “I got him!”

Chris is running through the grounds of the house. “Chris, stop!”

The boy stops, SWAT begins to surround them. He is holding a gun in his hand.

“Don’t shoot,” Will says to them. “You don’t have to worry about C.J. anymore. It’s okay. You’re home now. Put down the gun, Christopher.”

Chris shuffles his feet, tears welling in his eyes.

“Shoot him, Christopher,” a woman’s voice calls out. She appears out of the shadows, holding a gun to Chris’ back.

“Shoot him for me,” she says kindly to Chris before telling Will, “Drop your gun. For my boy.”

“You’re his new mother.”

“I am. And I love him, but I will do what I have to do for my family.”

“You abducted these boys. Your ‘son’ C.J. killed your other ‘son’ Connor. You burned his remains to honor him as his mother.”

She looks furious at Will questioning her motherhood.

“I’m honoring them like their other mothers wouldn’t. They’re not invisible anymore. I can see them. I see who they are and love them.”

“Be Christopher’s mother now. Protect him. Don’t murder him.”

“The most loving mothers commit murder with smiles on their faces. They force us to destroy the person we are. A subtle kind of murder.”

Will lets his gun fall to the ground.

“Shoot him, Christoper. Like I showed you.”

Chris’ glance at him is traumatized. It breaks Will’s heart and he wants to gather Chris up in his arms.

“Christopher, please,” Will pleads with the boy.

She raises her gun. A shot rings out. It is so unexpected that he checks his stomach to see where it hit. It takes a while for him to realize he hasn’t been shot.

The woman falls to the floor, blood spraying from her. Chris’s arm goes limp.

Will looks around to see Beverly with her gun outstretched, smoking from the barrel. He approaches Chris and kneels in front of him. Will carefully takes the gun from him, squeezing his hand gently. Beverly comes and guides the boy away.

He moves to the fallen woman, her breath coming in short gasps, tense with pain. Will watches her with condemnation. She doesn’t deserve to call herself a mother.

Will wants to see Hannibal then. He texts Hannibal and receives an answer almost immediately inviting him to dinner, Will accepts and heads home to clean up.

***

Hannibal opens the door and smiles when he sees Will. He had put on a suit. He isn't sure why he had decided on it, but Hannibal's reaction is flattering.

"You look tired," Hannibal says after a beat.

"This case, Hannibal. This one hurt. Family has always been so strange to me, something that has always been out of reach. But I have never wanted something more in my life."

Hannibal brushes a hand over Will's shoulder as he helps him out of his jacket. The touch warms him and Will smiles lazily. Being in Hannibal's presence is comforting and like a balm on his soul.

"I must confess something to you, Will. I invited Abigail for dinner. She was a little anxious, so I gave her a sedative. Just half a valium, so she may be a little hazy."

"She won't be upset to see me?"

"Not at all, in fact she is excited to see you."

Hannibal leads him through the hallway and into the dining room. Abigail is sat there with a smile on her face.

"Hi, Will."

"Hi, Abigail."

Hannibal pulls out a chair for Will and he sits. He notices that it means that he is sat to Hannibal's right. It feels like they are a family sitting down for dinner.

"Are you hungry? Hannibal made breakfast for dinner."

"I could eat."

It doesn't escape Will that the dinner is almost a mirror of what he had first eaten with Hannibal that morning in a Minnesotan motel room.

Abigail is watching them with a wide smile.

"What is it? What do you see?" Hannibal asks.

Her eyes well up slightly and she says, "I see family."

Will's heart swells and he can't help reaching for both Hannibal and Abigail's hands.

Hannibal's fingers wrap around his and Will squeezes gently.

“We could be.” Hannibal almost seems to whisper it.

Will gives him a puzzled look. “What do you mean?”

“I must confess I have not been entirely honest with you.”

“Oh?” Will’s heart is in his throat; he isn’t entirely sure what Hannibal is about to say.

“Although I think sustenance is in order first.”

Will nods and picks up his fork. Tucking into the food in front of him, he moans as the flavor bursts over his tongue. Hannibal preens at the noise.

“Delicious as ever.”

“I thought it would be good to start this next chapter with the meal that started it all.”

Will smiles and Hannibal smiles back at him, warming Will.

Abigail is watching them both with wide eyes and a slight smile on her face. Will knows that she is calculating something. He thinks that Hannibal must have told her something that he hasn’t told Will yet.

Hannibal chuckles and says to Will, “Finish your food.”

Will can only nod and he continues eating.

When they finish, Hannibal takes their plates back into the kitchen. Abigail watches Will with a conspiratorial smile.

“He told you something.”

“He did. But I promise it’s nothing bad.”

“I wonder what it could possibly be.”

“You will see.”

“See what?” Hannibal asks, and they turn to look at him.

“What you wanted to tell him, of course.”

“Ah yes. Abigail, why don’t you head to bed.”

She nods and leaves the room.

“Join me in the study, Will?”

Will nods and stands.

Following Hannibal through the house, he is too busy watching Hannibal to really notice much of the decor.

The study is reminiscent of Hannibal's office; it suits him. Imposing and just a little frightening, but it makes Will feel safe.

"Whiskey?"

"Please."

Hannibal goes to a bar cart and pours the amber liquid into a tumblr before pouring himself something else.

Passing the tumbler to Will, Hannibal makes sure that their fingers brush. Will is shocked by how good it feels. It sets something in him aflame. Suddenly his tie feels too tight, like he wants to rid himself of the constriction.

Will remembers then the way their fingers had brushed back in the Hobbs kitchen months ago. He had dismissed it, attributed it to the adrenaline of that moment. Even back then he hadn't wanted it to end. So when Hannibal's touch leaves him, Will has to suppress a whimper at the loss.

Hannibal stands close enough to touch and Will wants to reach out. To distract himself, he takes a sip of the whiskey. It is far nicer than anything he has previously tasted. Will decides then that his next bottle will be this whiskey, one that is emptying far quicker than it should.

"You wanted to tell me something?"

"Ah yes, I did think your wonderful mind would be returning to the topic."

Will snorts, "My mind isn't wonderful. It's a series of broken synapses that fire in completely incomprehensible patterns."

"Don't you see, Will? Those make us who we are."

"I've been different my entire life. I have accepted my lot in life as being broken."

"What made you broken?"

"Oh so many things. I have always been different. Iron allergy notwithstanding. I have always hated when someone touched me. It makes my skin crawl, like I want to claw it off. Until there is nothing left where I was touched."

"Interesting." Hannibal sips at his own drink and Will's eyes follow his throat moving as he swallows. Something itches in his mouth, like he needs to bite down and never let go. "And yet when I touched you just now, it seemed you weren't repulsed."

"I wasn't and I don't understand it either. But when you touch me, sparse as it has been, it's like something in me is calmed."

“I think I know why that is.”

“Was it growing up dirt poor, with a father who never knew what to do with his strange son?”

“No.”

Will sighs, he knows Hannibal has been able to divert the conversation away from what was happening.

“Although you were no doubt a strange child. But not for the reason you might be expecting.”

“Was it the lack of affection from my mother?”

“Difficult to give affection to a child with so much aversion to touch. Especially one that is not quite your own.”

“You mean to say that my parents are not my parents? And if that is the case how could you possibly know?”

Hannibal is silent for a moment, then he approaches Will until he is standing toe-to-toe with him. Will wants to reach out even more.

He inhales and is hit with the scent of Hannibal. It makes his mouth feel dry, and that same itch from before becomes an urge to sink his teeth into Hannibal’s neck and hold on.

“Do you feel that?” Hannibal is almost whispering, his breath bathing Will’s face.

“What is happening to me?”

“You are reacting because of your very nature.”

“And, what pray tell, is my very nature?”

Hannibal smiles. “Tell me, Wil...what do you know about the Unseelie Court?”

Will almost wants to laugh. “You mean the faerie courts?”

“So you have some knowledge?”

Will drinks in the scent of Hannibal; it is the only thing still keeping him somewhat calm. “All I know is that the Unseelie Court is from folklore, filled with malevolent spirits.”

Hannibal chuckles, “That’s one word for it. But I prefer the term free-spirited.”

“You prefer?”

“Yes.”

Will is so shocked that he almost moves backwards to try and put some distance between them, because he finds himself too distracted by Hannibal’s presence. Like his brain is fuzzy.

“I don’t understand.”

Hannibal takes Will’s empty glass from him, fingers brushing against his again. “But you do, don’t you?”

He leaves Will to get rid of the glass and Will feels like he can breathe again. His mind is whirling.

“You are more dangerous than anyone would think.” Hannibal is approaching him again with a smile on his face. He does look like a predator then. “You do what you want, when you want to. Everyone else is just swine in comparison.”

“Not quite everyone,” Hannibal says, and he strokes a thumb over Will’s cheek. It is so intimate that Will flushes. He doesn’t want Hannibal to ever stop touching him. It is so strange to Will that he has lived his entire life where everyone’s touch was painful, but now with Hannibal it feels like the rightest thing in his life thus far. Like there is a song in some part of his soul and Hannibal’s touch is the perfect complementary chord.

“Swine surrounds you, and they fill your table.” Will pauses, he thinks he can see all of Hannibal now. “Ripper.”

“Oh my remarkable boy,” Hannibal says before he brushes his thumb over Will’s lip. “But that’s not all I am.”

“No?”

Hannibal steps back. “See me, Will.”

The air around Hannibal shimmers. Will watches in trepidation as Hannnibal’s appearance changes. When the air seems to settle, he can see Hannibal clearly.

# Chapter 3

Hannibal is wearing a crown of flowers, similar to the ones Will had seen in his dreams, except this one has a pair of antlers that give Hannibal even more height. He cuts an impressive figure and Will feels almost weak-kneed.

“Your hair.” Will is almost embarrassed by the fact that that is the first thing out of his mouth. But Hannibal’s hair is long, and some strands have been tied back behind his head. Will reaches up to touch the strands, Hannibal gives a nod.

Will twists a lock between his fingers, it flows through them like water.

“Do you see now?”

Will nods, his eyes are beginning to fill with tears, and he cannot explain why.

“My remarkable boy.” Hannibal says as he laces their fingers together. “Have you ever wondered where your iron allergy comes from?”

“I just assumed that it was a quirk of human biology.”

Hannibal hums as he traces circles on the back of Will’s hand with his thumb. “And your aversion to touch.”

“Shitty parenting. My father hated me for my mother leaving. Used to say I was a changeling that drove my mother away.”

“He was right about one.”

“I drove her away.”

“Not that. Never that.”

“You mean to say I am a changeling?” Will is shocked, and he can feel himself begin to hyperventilate.

Hannibal shushes him slightly, a finger on his lips. “There is nothing to be panicked about. It was merely chance.”

“Chance?”

“That I found you. You would have lived your entire life alone, never quite fitting in with anyone. Never able to find someone who could see you the way I can.”

Will knows that to be true with every fibre of his being.

“What does this mean for us?” Will is terrified that everything will stay the same, left in the limbo of chasing the Chesapeake Ripper in an eternal dance.

“Whatever you want it to mean.” Hannibal is looking with such open fondness that Will’s heart aches.

“Can we leave? Leave everything behind? Isn’t there somewhere that our kind would gather?”

Hannibal smiles, “oh there is somewhere we can go.”

Will feels the heaviness in his heart begin to lift. “What about Abigail? All she has is us.”

“Abigail can come with us, I have already spoken to her.”

Will chuckles, “I should have expected that.”

“ We could disappear now. Tonight. Feed your dogs, leave a note for Alana, and never see her or Jack again.”

It sounds romantic, and exactly what Will needs in that moment.

“Jack won’t stop hunting the Ripper. He will try to find you.”

“Only if he doesn’t have someone who is the Ripper.”

“You have someone in mind?”

“Ever heard of Frederick Chilton?”

The name rings a bell, Will knows that he is the director of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. “I believe I have.”

“Dr Chilton has a patient who he has convinced that he is the Chesapeake Ripper through psychic driving and other methods of hypnotic suggestion.”

“The patient will be the Ripper?”

“No. Dr Chilton is going to be the Ripper. I have one more gift for Jack.”

“Will it take long?”

“I think I will need a few weeks to set everything in motion.”

“Is there anything I need to do?”

“You just see to it that Jack has no reason to connect the dots.” Hannibal says after a moment, “I know there are some parts of the profile that could implicate me. But I don’t want you to deny anything more vehemently.”

Will nods, he thinks that Hannibal has probably been able to thoroughly get Jack on his side.

Hannibal is smiling at him, and Will wants to reach out to touch him. Hannibal nods as if he knows exactly what Will is thinking.

He reaches for Hannibal's hand and squeezes gently. Then emboldened with the charged air between them he places a hand on Hannibal's cheek. Hannibal nuzzles into his hand and inhales deeply. The noise that comes from Hannibal can only be described as a purr.

Will wonders if that is normal, but he finds the noise soothing and he can feel his eyes begin to droop with tiredness.

"You should go, rest. Life will change dramatically in the next few weeks."

"I don't want to leave."

Hannibal purrs again. "I know but I don't know what I would do if you stay."

Will flushes, he can understand the direction that Hannibal's thoughts are going and he wants to stay to see what happens. He makes a noise of frustration and Hannibal chuckles before pressing a kiss to his forehead. Will has to stop his knees from buckling.

Hannibal releases him and steps back and Will doesn't know what to do with himself. "Can I say goodbye to Abigail?"

"Of course." Hannibal says and then leads Will to the hallway of his home. Once at the bottom of the stairs he leaves Will before he ascends. It's strange, the moment he is no longer in Will's line of sight he feels so bereft and unmoored.

After long moments he can hear Hannibal's footsteps as he moves down the stairs, followed by Abigail's lighter tread. Once she is at the bottom of the stairs, Will does something he never would have expected of himself. He wraps his arms around her and pulls her close.

This time, it doesn't feel like her touch burns him. Instead he has the strong feeling of holding his child. Will presses a kiss to the top of her head and says, "good night Abigail."

She looks at him with tear-filled eyes, but he can tell that she is happy. It radiates from her. It lightens Will, to know that she is happy.

"Good night Will." She says after a moment and holds him close.

They break apart and she goes back up the stairs. Leaving Hannibal and Will alone.

Hannibal is still resplendent with his crown of flowers and antlers, and Will has no doubt that Abigail knows more than he does of this world he had been kept away from till now. Will watches as they approach the door. Slowly Hannibal's human features return, until he looks exactly the way he had at the start of the evening.

The door opens and Will is shocked that the sky is completely black. It feels like he has only spent a few minutes with Hannibal. But he wants to spend every single moment with Hannibal.

"Well." He says slowly.

"Indeed." Hannibal says with a kind smile.

“Will you call me?”

“Of course.” Hannibal says slowly. “But you can call me if you like.”

The permission makes Will feel warm.

“I don’t really call people.”

“I can call you soon.”

“I’d like that.”

Then Will does something that shocks him, he leans forward and brushes a chaste kiss to Hannibal’s lips for the briefest of moments. When Will leans back he has to lick his own lips to try and get even a flash of taste from Hannibal. He wants to kiss him again with every fibre of his being.

Hannibal touches his lips as though he can’t quite believe what just happened either. Will wonders then if he has misread the situation, whether had been lulled in a false sense of security.

He makes a noise and turns away from Hannibal “I’m sorry, I will speak to you later.”

He is pulled into Hannibal’s chest with a hand around the back of his neck. His fingers dig into a spot on his neck that makes him feel like his bones have melted. Will looks up at Hannibal, through his lashes, his mind is a little sluggish.

“Never be sorry for that.” Hannibal practically growls before he kisses Will again.

This time the kiss could not be further from chaste. It makes his stomach swoop and he feels warm all over. He moans into the kiss and Hannibal uses his open mouth to get a taste of him. Hannibal tastes like something that he has been missing his entire life. Like the perfect complement to every dish.

When they break apart Will is breathing heavily, Hannibal’s jacket is wrinkled from where Will had been holding him. He reaches up to smooth out the wrinkles, Hannibal makes a pleased noise, that makes Will flush.

“I really need to leave.” Will says after a moment. “The dogs need to be let outside.”

“I would much prefer you to stay.”

“Me too.” Will sighs into the space between them. “But I must resist.”

Hannibal nods like he understands. And Will knows that he does, however hard it may be.

“Call me when you get home, so I know that you are safe.”

“I will.”

Will gets into the car, his head is spinning. He has to sit there for a few moments to calm his racing heart. He feels warm all over, like his skin is on fire.

Eventually he feels sane enough to buckle himself into the seat and then drives away from Hannibal. When he looks into his rearview mirror he sees that Hannibal is still standing there. A large part of him wants to turn around and drive back to Hannibal but he resists the urge.

Eventually he can no longer see Hannibal which makes his heart ache, like he is missing a piece of himself that he has already left with Hannibal.

Will vows then that he will see Hannibal as soon as he can.

As soon as he reaches home, he lets out the dogs into the yard. They are excited to see him, and it makes him feel a little more like a person again. Although he supposes he isn't truly a person, in the strictest sense of the world. But it makes him feel more like himself.

Once the dogs are in the yard he calls Hannibal. He picks up in the first few rings, like he has been waiting for Will's call, and the thought makes him feel cared for in a way he hadn't expected.

"Hello Will." Hannibal purrs down the phone, and Will feels that familiar flash of warmth that he has come to associate with Hannibal's voice.

"Hello Hannibal."He breathes back. Surprised at how breathless he sounds.

"I gather that you have arrived back home."

"I have." Will sighs. "I feel like I should have stayed. Even though I know my dogs needed me."

"Perhaps another evening. You can pack a bag and arrange a sitter."

"You make it sound so simple."

"My darling boy, it is that simple."

"I suppose I could ask a neighbour, but it is a lot to impose on someone."

"I could help you find someone you could board them with."

"That's too much, Hannibal."

"Nonsense. I am the one that would be creating an imposition for you." Hannibal pauses. "Unless I stay at yours."

It's not a question, but a statement and Will finds himself agreeing.

"I suppose that can be arranged."

"Excellent. Maybe you can catch something for us. I do so like a challenge in the kitchen."

“There are some trout I have in the river.”

“I do prefer a fresh kill.”

Will cannot deny him that. And he finds himself desperate to please Hannibal in every way.

“I can catch something.”

“Excellent.” Hannibal purrs again, a deep rumbling sound through the speaker that makes him feel even warmer.

“Goodnight mylimasis.”

“Goodnight Hannibal.” Will says and waits for Hannibal to hang up because he can’t bare the thought of being apart from him for even a second. When Hannibal does, Will instantly feels bereft. He wonders for a second if it will always be like this.

He goes into his house,  the dogs following him inside. He feeds them and then sends them to their beds. He watches them as they settle, the hour is later than he expected but he feels restless. Something is calling at him, he thinks he knows exactly what it is, Hannibal being over an hour away.

Will considers calling him, to listen to his voice as he falls asleep, but he doesn’t quite trust himself not to use the opportunity to turn the phone call into an entirely different direction.

When he was younger he had only ever dated people that lived too far away to ever easily visit, contenting to interact via phone or photos. It had never felt quite as right as seeing or speaking to Hannibal.

Thinking of hearing Hannibal’s voice curl around his name and all manner of dirty things he had imagined someone doing to him makes arousal curl low in his stomach. He decides then to go have a shower to have some time alone.

Stripping out of his clothes makes him feel a little better, the low heat that has been spreading through him since Hannibal had first touched him that evening. He is sweating heavily, and he steps into the shower.

Once the water is beating down him, the tension in his shoulders begins to ease. Washing perfunctorily, ignoring the heat in his groin. When he has cleaned his body, he turns his attention to his cock. He wraps a wet hand around himself, moaning at the sensation. It has been too long since he had any form of release, too wrapped up in trying to keep up with the cases that had happened.

Stroking slowly with one hand he has to brace himself against the wall. Will imagines Hannibal’s hand joining his, imagines the man’s larger hand encasing his completely. “Fuck.” he hisses.

“Look at you, my darling boy. Absolutely dripping for me already.” Hannibal’s voice sounds thick with arousal and his accent.

“Yess.” He hisses, he wishes Hannibal was there with him to be able to hold on to him, wants those hands on every inch of his body. The hand that he is using to hold himself upright and trails it down, and past his cock and to his hole.

It’s like Hannibal is reaching behind him. His fingers brushing against his hole. He gasps, the sensation is indescribable. Will wants Hannibal to sink his fingers straight in, like he is so empty that he can barely stand it. And only Hannibal can fill this emptiness.

The angle is awkward but he is able to push in a finger to the second knuckle. It soothes the part of him that is desperate to be filled, even if it isn’t nearly enough. Pumping his finger in and out, fucking his fist at the same time.

“Come on, darling boy.” Hannibal’s voice urges him on, another finger sliding in to join the first. “You look magnificent.”

Will nods, even though he doesn’t know what he is agreeing to. He needs Hannibal inside of him more keenly than he has ever needed someone else.

“I can’t wait to mark you up, so everyone will know that you’re mine and I am yours.” He is so close to coming. “When I have you, I will claim you from the inside, until you’re dripping with me. You’ll never know a world where there won’t be a part of me inside of you.”

His orgasm overtakes him, crashing through him like a battering ram. Every cell in his body sings in ecstasy and outrage that Hannibal isn’t there with him. Will’s leg almost give out from underneath, shocked at the strength of his climax.

“Good boy.” Hannibal’s voice purrs at him and Will whines. He should be able to nuzzle into the man’s neck to breathe in greedily.

Once his heart calms down he carefully pulls out his fingers. The emptiness returns but he chooses to ignore it. He lets his come wash down the drain, rinsing the sweat of his skin.

Stepping out of the shower, he pulls on a pair of boxers and t-shirt and stumbles into bed.

Will falls asleep as soon as his head hits the pillow.

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Will wakes from his sleep, feeling more rested than he has in a long time. He doesn’t remember much of his dreams, odd how they had been so vivid in the past. Especially since he met Hannibal. All he does remember is flashes of heat, skin and touch.

He pulls back the covers and he is covered in his fluids, completely slick. Sighing he goes to shower, before dressing for work. Will texts Hannibal, not expecting a response but he gets a call almost immediately.

“Good morning, darling boy.” Will’s heart flutters at hearing Hannibal’s voice. “I hope you had a good evening after you left.

Will feels his heart race, sure somehow that Hannibal knows exactly what transpired the previous night.

“It was pleasant enough.”

“I can imagine.” Hannibal purrs.

“Is it too early for me to see you?”

“My kitchen is always open to friends.”

“I thought we were more than friends.”

“That depends on what you want.”

“I want to see you.”

Will can almost see Hannibal’s smile. “Then come over.”

“I will see you shortly.”

Will hangs up the phone and his heart is a flutter. Taking care of the dogs before he gets into his car. He drives to Hannibal’s, happy that he has woken up early enough to do this before his classes.

He arrives at Hannibal’s house and Hannibal opens the door to him, he is in a bathrobe, his hair mussed as though he has just been roused from sleep. It softens something around Hannibal, and it makes Will feel safe.

“I’m sorry it’s so early.” Will says as he follows Hannibal into the kitchen, where Hannibal begins to make him coffee from a contraption that looks far too complicated to make at this time in the morning.

“Never apologize for coming to me. Office hours are for patients. And like I said my kitchen is always open for you.”

Will smiles as Hannibal hands him a cup of coffee. He takes a sip, it is of course the nicest coffee he has ever had, and Hannibal has somehow managed to get the exact way he likes his coffee. It doesn’t surprise him in the slightest.

“Any nightmares?”

“I don’t think so. The dreams have been more pleasant tonight.”

“Have they?”

“I don’t remember exactly what happened.”

“What a shame, I would have much liked to discuss what happened.”

Will only hums and smiles.

“If it were nightmares I may have thought it was good old-fashioned post traumatic stress. Jack Crawford has gotten your hands very dirty.”

“Wasn’t forced back into the field.”

“I wouldn’t say forced. Manipulated would be the word I’d choose. Besides I think you’re going to be getting my hands far dirtier.”

“Am I?” Hannibal says with a chuckle.

“Hmm. That does depend.”

“Depend on what?” Hannibal is approaching him slowly, like the predator he is.

“What you do next.”

Hannibal pulls him close by his shirt and kisses him. Will winds his arms around Hannibal, holding him close. One of Hannibal’s hands is on the small of his back, and the other at the nape of his neck. He digs his fingers in and Will feels like his legs give out. It is only Hannibal’s strength that is holding him upright. When Hannibal releases him Will leans against him.

He sees a flash of red in Hannibal’s eyes and it’s intoxicating. “That was something.”

“Indeed it was, darling boy.” Hannibal releases him and steps back. “Although I don’t want you to go to work, you smell delectable.”

“I do really have to go, there are students who need an education.”

“How do they pay attention when you’re their teacher? Are they not driven to complete distraction?”

“I don’t know, I must admit I don’t really pay any attention to them.”

“I doubt that completely. I have seen you in action and you are radiant.”

Will flushes, a clock chimes and he realises he has to leave in order to make it to his first class of the day.

“You have to leave, don’t you?” Hannibal asks, as if he has picked up on Will’s mood.

“I do, but I don’t want to.”

“I don’t want you to either, but we both have a few things to do before we can leave together.”

Will hums, he finishes his cup of coffee and places it on the counter. Hannibal approaches him again, he kisses Will again. This time chastely, as though he couldn’t quite trust himself to kiss Will more deeply.

Hannibal steps back, “it will be cold today, do you have a scarf?”

Will almost wants to roll his eyes, “I don’t.”

“Stay here.” Hannibal says, and he sounds so commanding that Will stays rooted to the spot.

Hannibal leaves the room, and Will misses him almost immediately, he can still smell Hannibal in the room, which makes it clear to Will how often Hannibal is in the kitchen. But his presence and warmth is so lacking in the room that Will has to almost suppress a whine, that feels like it is coming from somewhere deep inside him.

When he returns, Hannibal is carrying a long narrow box, wrapped with a ribbon. The sight warms him. Hannibal places the box down in front of him on the counter and Will reaches out slowly after Hannibal’s nod.

Carefully Will undoes the gold ribbon, it feels like water as it slides through his fingers and Will cannot stop letting it glide through his fingers. Then he lifts the lid of the box, inside is a beautiful woolen scarf. He touches the scarf and it is the softest thing he has ever touched. It is a shade of blue that Will recognises from when he looks in the mirror.

“Hannibal it is beautiful. I can’t accept this.”

“It is, and you can.” Hannibal’s tone brokers no arguments and Will finds himself nodding. Hannibal takes the scarf from the box, “may I?”

Will finds himself nodding almost frantically. Hannibal wraps the scarf around him, and then tucks the ends into his jacket. Having Hannibal’s hands near his neck makes Will lean into Hannibal, the scarf is almost too tight but it makes him feel safe and cared for.

Hannibal steps back and purrs, “perfect.”

He flushes at the praise. “I don’t know how to thank you Hannibal.”

“There is no need to thank me. I just want to give you nice things.”

Will touches the scarf gently, “this is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for me. Thank you, Hannibal.”

He leans forwards and gives Hannibal a peck on the lips. “I really do have to leave now.”

Hannibal nods and leads him to the door with a possessive hand on the small of his back, just over the points that had made him boneless and lax earlier.

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Hannibal places a plate in front of Will and then sits next to him.

“A masterpiece foie gras au torchon with a late harvest Vidal sauce and dry and fresh figs.”

It looks delicious like everything Hannibal has made. “This looks good.”

“I hope you enjoy it.”

Will takes a bite and moans when the flavors burst on his tongue.

“I see you’re enjoying it.”

“You have no idea.”

“Is that the only thing of mine you hope to enjoy?”

“That depends.”

“On what?”

“We shall see.”

“I heard that you stood up to Jack.”

“I only told him what he needed to hear, I am not the one to be commanded around.”

Hannibal chuckles, “have you determined how this Angel Maker is choosing his victims?”

Will knew that the conversation was going to turn to the case that is taking up his time when he isn’t with Hannibal. As when he is with Hannibal it is like he cannot think about anything or anyone else.

“He doesn’t see people how everyone else sees them. He can tell if you’re naughty or nice. Or he thinks he can.”

“God has given this Angel Maker insight into the souls of man?”

“God didn’t give him insight. Gave him a tumor. He’s just a man whose brain is playing tricks on him.”

“You’re not unlike this killer.”

“My brain is playing tricks on me?”

“You want to feel such sweet and easy peace. He hopes to feel his way cautiously inside it and find it is endless all around him.”

“He’s going to be disappointed.”

“That he is, as you have a way out.”

“With you.”

“With me.” Hannibal says resolutely. “Now, eat your dinner.”

Will chuckles and finishes the plate in front of him. Once he places down his flatware, Hannibal is gathering their plates. Will wants to stand but Hannibal commands him to stay, so

he does.

He looks around the room, focussing on the wall of herbs, it is beautiful. Will stands to approach the wall and inspect it more closely. It is, like many things about Hannibal, ostentatious and overwhelming but strangely comforting. He paces the room until he is stood in front of a painting. When he sees the scene it depicts he flushes. *Leda and The Swan* is a bold choice for a dining room but it makes sense.

He hears an inhale behind him. “Did you just smell me?”

“Difficult to avoid. I have a sensitive nose. You smell delectable. Like whiskey and ripe peaches.”

“Ready to bite?”

“You have no idea.”

Hannibal snakes his arms around him and pulls Will to his chest. Having the solid warmth of Hannibal at his back is dizzying.

He holds onto Hannibal’s hands, and tilts his neck for Hannibal to explore. Hannibal nuzzles over his neck, focussing on a spot just behind his ear. Teeth scrape over the spot and Will melts, he feels like his burning from the inside out.

There is a purr that seems to be bubbling in his throat, which he finds strange but he thinks that it might be explained by his nature.

“Tell me about the courts.” Will says after a moment.

“Oh Will. It is beautiful. Hidden just out of sight, unless you know how and where to look.”

Will hums, content to be surrounded by Hannibal. “You will be revered as a Queen my love.”

“A queen?” Will asks after a beat.

“Yes.” Hannibal doesn’t explain any further. He lets go of Will, “a cup of coffee before you go?”

“Yes I suppose I ought to.” Will sighs. “Jack has an interview set up tomorrow with the wife of a possible suspect.”

“I would much rather have you spend the day here.”

“Me too.” Will says, Hannibal is still nuzzling his neck and he wants to stay like this for the foreseeable future. “But I don’t think I will sleep a wink if I stay here.”

“You would, after expending some energy.”

The thought makes arousal curl low in his stomach, he wants nothing more than to have Hannibal’s hands all over him.

“I can smell that, you know.” Hannibal whispers into his ear.

“Smell what?”

“Your arousal. It makes your scent sharper, like a fine whiskey that is ready to be sipped.”

“You can’t just say something like that, when I’m supposed to leave.”

“I can’t help it, you make me want to throw caution to the wind.”

“I want you to.” Will breathes. His heart is rabbiting. One of Hannibal’s hands is spread over his chest, the other is slowly drawing its way down his body.

“Maybe just a little taste.” Hannibal says as he unbuttons Will’s pants. Will inhales deeply. He can smell Hannibal all around him and the thought makes a whine build in his throat.

Hannibal presses another kiss against the spot behind his ear. “I want to hear you.”

The hand cups him, and Will hasn’t realised how hard he was. Slowly Hannibal strokes him through his boxers, there is a growing damp spot.

Then one of those hands slips into his boxers and Will groans. He looks down to see Hannibal’s hand holding him, he moans when he realises how large Hannibal’s hand looks around him. His cock is leaking and Hannibal’s thumb dips into the slit and Will gasps.

All he can think about is having one of Hannibal’s long thick fingers inside of him. Will feels hot all over.

Hannibal is stroking him closer and closer to orgasm, and Will clutches onto him. Then Hannibal grinds his hip against Will’s ass, and Will can feel how hard he is against him. Will comes with a half-strangled cry. Hannibal keeps stroking him until Will is whimpering with almost-pain. Slowly Hannibal releases him, and Will can barely control his breathing.

Will spins round to face Hannibal who is grinning at him, Hannibal licks his fingers clean and Will’s cock twitches valiantly. Will groans and then kisses him again, his spent cock rubs against the fabric of Hannibal’s pants. The friction is overwhelming and he whines into the kiss.

He steps back, and reaches for Hannibal’s pants, but Hannibal stops him with a look. Will takes his hand back, and Hannibal takes his hand and presses a kiss to his knuckles.

“Now I think it is time for you to go.”

Will nods, he feels a little dazed. Hannibal leads him to the door after tucking Will back into his pants and buttoning him up again, one hand on the small of his back. Hannibal gives him a peck on his lips before he opens the door for him.

Stepping out into the cool afternoon air makes his head feel a little clearer. Getting into the car, he realises that the seat of his pants is damp, he assumes that the mixture of sweat and Hannibal leaking is to blame so he doesn’t think much of it.

***

The barn is old and dilapidated, the grass outside of it is dead. It seems ominous. When the fo inside there is an angel hung from the rafters. It is illuminated by shafts of light, so it looks like a painting. Next to Will Jack sighs.

“This will be the last one.”

Jack shines a flashlight across the Angel’s face. It looks to be the same one as on the driver’s license that Jack had shown him.

“It’s Budish?”

“He made himself into an angel.”

Blood drips onto the floor from the flesh of the wings. Will is transfixed listening to the dripping sounds. Behind him he hears Jack shout at the local police to get a coroner to their location.

“It wasn’t God, wasn’t man, it was his choice to die.”

“His choice?”

“As much as he could make it.”

“You feel a shortage of choices?” Jack looks slightly concerned.

Will pauses, he knows that it is the right time to start dropping hints that he wants to leave. “I don’t know how much longer I can be useful to you Jack.”

“Really? You caught three. The last three we had, you caught.”

“I didn’t catch this one. Elliot Budish surrendered.”

Jack is frustrated and he starts walking away, “I’m used to not getting information from my wife. I don’t need to not get information from you too.”

“It’s getting harder and harder to make myself look.” Will can hear Jack stop.

“No one is asking you to look alone.”

“But I am looking alone. And you know what looking at this does.”

“I know what happens when you don’t look. So do you.”

Will knows that ordinarily this would have made him clam up and just continue but he has Hannibal now. “I can make myself look but the thinking is shutting down.”

“What is it about this one?”

“It’s not this one. It’s all of them. It’s the next one. It’s the one I know is coming after that.”

“I don’t think you want to go back to your lecture hall and read about the next one on TattleCrime.com.”

Will wants to chuckle. “No I don’t but that may be what I have to do. This is bad for me.”

“I’m not the pope, I’m not going to tell you what you ought to do-”

“Sounds like that’s exactly what you’re going to do.”

“You go back to your classroom and there’s more killing that you could have prevented, it will sour that classroom forever.” Will knows that Jack is trying to manipulate him, sees it as clear as day.

“Maybe. Then maybe I will find a job as a diesel mechanic in a boatyard.”

Jack is watching him, before he turns and walks out again. “If you want to quit, quit.”

And there is the opening that Will was looking for, if he is able to help Hannibal with framing Chilton then he has the opening to just leave. Will knows that catching the Ripper will be the pinnacle of Jack’s career.

***

The asylum is a grim reproduction of Gothic architecture, Will wants to be far from the building. Not entirely certain that the doors won’t close on him forever once he sets foot inside.

“Freddie Lounds ran an unconfirmed story that the Chesapeake Ripper may already be in custody.” Jack says as he exits the vehicle.

Will knows that this may well be part of Hannibal’s plan, so it makes Will feel hopeful. He tries to school his features so they don’t show the glee he is feeling. “Unconfirmed? Am I confirming? Fact-checking for Freddie Lounds?”

“You’re fact-checking for me.”

As they approach the door, the sign ‘Criminally Insane’ sends a shudder down his spine.

“I’m always a little nervous going into one of these places. Afraid they’ll never let me out again.”

“Don’t worry. I’m not going to leave you here.”

“Not today.”

They are led to the office of Dr Chilton , the current acting director of the institute. When they arrive Dr Chilton stands to shake Will’s hand. Will can see immediately why Hannibal has chosen him, he is wearing an expensive suit in colors that clash. Unlike Hannibal he is not able to pull this off, instead the suit seems to be just a hair too big. Dr Chilton watches him with hungry eyes.

“Doctor Bloom just called me about you, Mr Graham. Or should I call you Dr Graham?”

“I’m not a doctor.”

“You’re not FBI either. That’s a temporary identification.”

“Mr Graham teaches at the academy.” Jack interjects.

Chilton doesn’t want to see Will leave his office, that much is clear from his attempts to make as much conversation as possible with them. Luckily for Will Jack is too impatient for the details of Gideon’s mail but wants to get the analysis of the crime scene underway as soon as possible.

Will knows that Jack is desperate to confirm whether Gideon is the Chesapeake Ripper. Finally Chilton relents and seems to give his approval to see the scene. He even reluctantly agrees that Will can see the scene in privacy.

“Ah yes. That thing you do. You are quite the topic of conversation in psychiatric circles.”

“Am I?”

Chilton is looking at him with that naked hunger of someone who wants to get inside his brain to try and puzzle him out. “A unique blend of personality disorders and neuroses that makes you a highly skilled profiler.”

“Graham isn’t here to be analyzed.” Jack is quick to jump to his defense, when he feels like his favorite tool is being criticized.

“Perhaps he should be.” Chilton faces Will more fully. “We’re woefully short of material on your sort of thing, Mr. Graham. Would you mind talking with some of the staff -- no, no, not this trip. Dr. Bloom was very severe with me on that point. We’re to leave you alone. Maybe a special visit?”

“Thank you, *Doctor* Chilton. I’d like to see the crime scene now.”

Chilton leads them down the hall to the infirmary.

Inside the room the nurse’s body is impaled on the broken frames of privacy curtains that have been sharpened to spears. Her entire body is a tapestry of wounds, organs are impaled on shards of wood and metal so they look as though they are floating above her.

“The reason you failed and kept failing to catch the Chesapeake Ripper is I already had him.”

Jack shoots Chilton a look and then motions for them to leave the room so Will is by himself.

Will descends into the scene and into the mind of Gideon. Watching the scene unfold behind his eyes. It feels like an ill-fitting Ripper suit, like Gideon doubts that he is the Ripper but something is making him think he is. Will knows then what Hannibal had meant when he said that Chilton had had some influence. It will make it easier for Chilton to fall.

“As far as we know, the Chesapeake Ripper hasn’t killed in over two years. When was Gideon admitted?” Will asks when Chilton and Jack re-enter the room.

“Almost two years ago.”

Will looks at Jack who appears deep in thought, Will had heard about the trainee Miriam Lass and that she had gone missing when investigating the Chesapeake Ripper. He wonders what Hannibal has done with her.

“I’ve been doing this a long time and I’ve never seen one like this. This kind of psychopath is rare.”

***

When Will gets home he is surprised to find a cooler box sat on his porch. He picks it up and finds an envelope attached, it is written in Hannibal’s familiar handwriting and it warms Will with affection.

Almost in a daze he enters his house, the dogs are intrigued by the box but after a few seconds leave him alone. Knowing that Hannibal drove all that distance just to drop off some food for him is overwhelming in the best possible way.

Inside the kitchen Will opens the envelope to look at the instructions that Hannibal has left him on reheating the food.

Once Will has fed his dogs he reheats the stew that Hannibal has made for him. He is a little surprised that Hannibal has made him something simpler than what he would serve at his dinner table. But once Will begins to eat it is as delicious as anything he has eaten at his table.

After finishing his meal Will calls Hannibal, who predictably answers within the first few rings.

“Good evening, mylimasis.”

“Good evening, Hannibal.”

“How was your visit with Dr Chilton.”

“He is perfect.”

Will can almost hear Hannibal’s purr of delight.

“Chilton is almost desperate to have me stay at the BSHCI to study. He was almost salivating at the thought.”

Hannibal growls before clearing his throat. The jealousy is apparent and it sends a curl of want through Will. “I cannot entirely blame him, you are a singularity.”

“I would rather he didn’t see me like a rat for study.”

“Soon, my love. The web around Chilton is tightening.”

“Good.”

“Did you enjoy your meal?”

“I did. Thank you Hannibal.”

“No need to thank me Will. I merely look after my own.”

That thought makes Will feel looked after and loved. “Good night Hannibal.”

“Good night sweet thing.”

Hannibal hangs up and Will is suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that he loves Hannibal completely. It has been mere months but something about Hannibal calls to something in his soul that makes him know that he is the one for Will.

***

Will is sat outside Gideon’s cell, once again he has the distinct impression of confusion from Gideon, even though the man is calm and confident in his answers.

“The mystery is whether you are who you say you are. Or not.”

“I never liked being called the Chesapeake Ripper. Maybe something a little more distinct. Any Ripper is going to pale in comparison to the infamous Jack of Whitechapel.”

“Is that why you didn’t take credit for the Ripper murders before now?”

“I was just enjoying the goose chase from the box seats.”

“Two years of goose-chasing. You must be a very patient man.”

“Are you going to walk me through the Psychopathy Checklist? I’ve had my personality inventoried by the Minnesota Multiphasic.”

“Would you prefer a Rorschach test?” Will is almost reminded of his back and forth with Hannibal, but he knows that the man in front of him is not at the same level of ease that Hannibal is with himself.

“If you show me those pictures, might I suggest you put a blood pressure cuff on my genitals. Far more accurate gauge on my response.”

Will knows then that there is no way, even outside of his knowledge of Hannibal’s nature, that Gideon is the Ripper. The Ripper’s delight in violence and torture is in the act itself and not any sexual gratification.

“What effect were you hoping to have by killing Elizabeth Shell?”

“That’s the nurse’s name? The effect I was hoping for was her death.” He pauses, regarding Will for long moments. “Elevated to my art.”

“You ate a tube of rheumatoid arthritis ointment for your art.”

“Had to look ill. The capsaicin in the salve irritated my stomach lining so I would sweat profusely.”

Brutalization of the body was done posthumously. The Chesapeake Ripper usually does that sort of thing during, not after.”

“I don’t need to convince you I’m the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“Seems that’s what you need to do. It’s certainly what someone needs.”

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They are in the morgue, Jack looks pensive, like his mind is elsewhere. Will wonders where that might be, it is certainly not entirely on the body in front of them.

“Nothing ever came up connecting the Chesapeake Ripper and Dr Gideon on the Latent Descriptor Index.” Price says after a moment.

“There’s no detectable consistency with the Ripper victims. He doesn’t hunt exclusively within his own ethnic group. He’s killed all creeds, colors, men and women.” Beverly adds.

“She has the exact same wound patterns as the last known victim of the Chesapeake Ripper. Exact.” Zeller adds as he points to the pattern of implements and debris that had been used to create the last known victim.

“We didn’t find a body for his last know victim.” Jack says with finality.

“Then the victim before that.” Zeller says, with a small amount of contrition.

“I see the Ripper but I don’t, feel the Ripper. He’s an artist. This is plagiarism.”

“We never made the wound patterns on any of the Ripper victims public.” Jack says carefully.

“Maybe he is the Ripper, I don’t know. But if he is the plagiarist, he would have needed the information from the real Chesapeake Ripper. And the Ripper is going to make sure everyone knows that.” Will adds, he can see why Hannibal wanted him to be witness to this, to sow the seeds for Chilton’s demise.

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Jack is furious and trying to keep a lid on his anger. Will knows that an undercurrent to Jack’s anger is fear. Because it seems like the Chesapeake Ripper has been in his house and played a recording for him on his landline.

Even though the team is unable to find any evidence of the call. Jack is butting heads with Price who is sure that there has been no call and that Jack had just been confused. Jack looks ready to strike him and Zeller. Will adds fuel to the fire by making the link that Gideon could not have called therefore not being the Ripper.

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Finding himself back in Chilton's office is not something that Will wants to be doing, but he knows that it will help them all. As he is there to give Alana enough time to interview Gideon without Chilton's interference. Chilton knows that it is a manipulation but he is too focussed on trying to get information out of Will to really care. Will is almost certain that Chilton is trying to find a way to write a study about him. Some of the questions he asks about Will's diagnoses that he has amassed over his lifetime.

In the middle of their conversation the lights flicker out with a groan. Emergency lighting flashes on. Chilton and Will jump to their feet and move into the corridor and down the hallway to reach the cell block. Guards begin shouting as they approach various inmates, before they approach the last, Gideon's cell.

"Get away from her. Step away now." Will approaches as the man shouts at whoever is in the cell. "Turn around and lace your fingers behind your head."

When Will sees the cell, Alana is standing there calmly. Gideon is backing away his fingers behind his head.

The security storm into the cell to take down Gideon and Alana walks out.

"Pulled me into his cell to protect me from the other patients. Would the real Chesapeake Ripper do that?"

Will is certain that Hannibal would have done the same for Alana. "Come to think of it, he might."

Chilton enters the ward. His absence seems stark now, even though Will knows that Hannibal must have foreseen this.

"What happened?" Will asks Chilton.

"We had a power outage. Entire hospital. No one knows what caused it. We're on backup generators." He looks around and sees Alana. "Is everyone alright?"

He glances at Alana and then the bound Gideon.

"I'm fine."

***

Will feels like he is on a rollercoaster where he can't what is happening next, he knows that Hannibal has designed it to be that way. Wants Will's reactions to be genuine.

Jack has received another call but this time the call was to his cell. It means they are able to track it easily. The trace has led them to this abandoned observatory. It is eerie because it is so quiet except their talking as they discuss Miriam's last movements. Many of them are unknown to them. She had been working on her own off the books.

Jack takes his phone out of his pocket and says "that last call left something the others didn't. A phone number."

Jack presses the call button and waits. The air is completely still like everyone had inhaled deeply and is just waiting for something to happen. Then Will hears it; a distant ring followed by another.

Everyone turns to the observatory. Slowly the gathered agents enter the building, clearing each room as the press forward into the center.

There in the center amongst abandoned equipment and dusty machines is the source of the ringing. Partially obscured by plastic wrap. Before Will can see more clearly the screen of the phone goes dark as the rings fall silent. Jack aims his flashlight at the phone and with gloved hands carefully pulls back the plastic wrap to reveal an arm holding  a cell phone.

Jack freezes in his tracks, the arm is just at the side of the eyepiece of a telescope as though directing the gaze towards it. The arm itself is greying, only slightly discolored.

Beneath the telescope is a sign with a simple note, 'what do you see?' Jack hangs his head in frustration. He looks exhausted and like he wishes he hadn't opened this box again.

***

Will knows that the image of a tongue being used as a page marker is currently displayed over his torso, he thinks Hannibal would find the image amusing.

"The Chesapeake Ripper murders in Sounders of three."

He walks his students through the first known murders committed by the Chesapeake Ripper.

Will clicks through eachset of images. He glances at them flashing up on his laptop and he finds himself in awe all over again. He had thought them beautiful even before he knew Hannibal's involvement in them. Now, however, it is like he can see the true meaning of them. Here is a person who is screaming to the Heavens that they are better than everyone else, better than all the pigs who mill around in their own shit.

"I use the term sounders because it refers to a small group of pigs. That's how he sees his victims. Not as people, not as prey. Pigs."

His students are taking furious notes as he talks, and he wonders if they could ever be able to see the beauty in these scenes in the same way he does. Will knows that they are incapable of fully understanding what motivates Hannibal. Will isn't sure that he entirely knows either, there is no discernible pattern to any of his kills. Hannibal kills because he wants to, and because he can.

The next image appears on screen. “11 months after the sixth victim there was a seventh.”

An image of the eighth victim is projected for everyone to see. This body is the original to the scene that Will had seen at the BSHCI. “Two days later, the eighth is killed in his workshop. Every tool on the pegboard was used against him. As with the previous murders, organs were removed.

Clicking the remote until a familiar image appears on screen: The Wound Man. Will knows that Hannibal has his own recreation of the sketch, tucked away alongside the other sketches he has made.

“The removal of organs and abdominal mutilations means someone with anatomical or surgical knowhow. There is a distinctive brutality.”

In the corridor Will can see the dark figure of Jack, who looks resigned. At his side is Hannibal, a smile tugs at Will’s lips, he is so happy to see the man. Will knows that Hannibal cannot resist seeing his work displayed for everyone to see.

“An FBI trainee named Miriam Lass was investigating private medical records of all known victims when she disappeared. She is believed to be the Ripper’s ninth.

Miriam’s picture from her ID badge shows up on the screen, and Will can see how it makes Jack deflate even further.

“But no trace of her was ever found. Until recently, two years later. Her severed arm was discovered. Only because *he* wanted it to be.”

Miriam’s arm holding the cell phone appears on screen then. He can see his students recoil slightly. Will only has eyes for Hannibal as he says, “true to his established pattern, the Chesapeake Ripper has remained consistently theatrical.”

Hannibal smiles at him with teeth, and he feels that familiar curl of arousal low in his stomach. Hannibal seems to inhale as though he knows exactly what Will is feeling because his grin gets even wider and sharper.

***

Will arrives at Hannibal’s house and smiles when Hannibal opens the door to him and kisses him there on the doorstep for everyone to see.

He tastes like a rich wine. “Have you been drinking?”

“I had a glass of wine with my last appointment.”

Jealousy blooms in his chest. “You drank with a patient?”

“She drank with a patient. I have an unconventional psychiatrist.” The beast in Will’s chest settles at that.

“We have that in common.”

Hannibal only smiles at that, “am I just your psychiatrist or are we something different?”

“Yes, I think is the answer to that.”

“We do have a higher level of intimacy than the common doctor-patient relationship. Almost as though we have a daughter together.”

That sentence fills Will with that longing that he feels everytime Hannibal mentions family.

“I don’t have a lot of relationships.”

“Having a better understanding of why people do what they do doesn’t make it any easier.”

“Is it easy for you?”

“I cope.”

Hannibal leads him into the study, where he pours Will a glass and hands it to him. Again Hannibal makes sure that their fingers brush and that same rush of electricity and warmth that he feels every time Hannibal touches him.

“Chesapeake Ripper has struck again.”

“It’s not the same guy.” Will says with a wry smile.

“The victims were all brutalized. What was the brutalization hiding?”

“Careful, surgical removal and preservation of vital organs.”

“Valuable organs.”

“Organ harvesters?”

“Jack’s looking for a serial killer he can’t seem to catch. It’s a brilliant diversion.”

“Isn’t it just?” Will probes.

“Oh my dear Will, I can assure you that whatever I have planned will become apparent very soon. You won’t be able to miss anything.”

“I certainly hope so.”

“Now, I believe I promised dinner.”

“That you did.”

“But that’s not the only thing I have for you.”

“Hannibal you have to stop giving me things.”

“Nonsense, it is my solemn duty and honor to court you.”

“Court me?” Will says breathlessly. Hannibal is stood right in front of him, and all Will can smell is him. It makes him feel weak in the knees.

“Of course mylimasis. After all you are my Queen.”

“Right.”

Then Hannibal cups his chin in one hand and bends down to kiss him. Hannibal tastes like wine and something that is just him, a little bloody. Will loves it. He moans into the kiss.

He only breaks away when he is dizzy with lack of oxygen. He feels warm everywhere, but Hannibal’s bare skin, where he can feel it, is like a soothing balm. “Won’t dinner spoil?”

“It will keep.” Hannibal says with a smile as he slowly unbuttons Will’s shirt.

Will gasps each time his fingers brush against his chest, gasps turn into a moan when Will’s shirt is open and Hannibal skates his large hands over the expanse of his chest.

Hannibal pays special attention to his nipples, Will didn’t know they could be so sensitive. Each brush feels like there is a direct livewire to his cock. Hannibal teases him with his fingers until they are stiff peaks.

His shirt is pushed from his shoulders until he is stood there in topless and Hannibal touching every inch of exposed skin that he can. Hannibal pulls him close until he is pressed against his chest. The fabric of his shirt brushes against him and the friction is almost painful against his sensitive chest. He can feel his cock brush up against the hard hot length of Hannibal’s and all Will can think about is having Hannibal inside him. He wants it with every

One of Hannibal’s hands presses against a spot just over his tailbone and Will’s knees actually buckle and Will moans.

“Beautiful.” Hannibal purrs into his ear before he kisses at that spot behind his ear. Slowly Hannibal backs him into the chaise that is on one side of the study. Will collapses into it as soon as Hannibal lets go of him.

Hannibal looms over him, blocking out the light, so all Will can see is his antlered silhouette. Will whines when he sees Hannibal’s true self. Something in him instinctively knows that Hannibal is it for him.

Will pulls at Hannibal’s trousers to draw him closer and Hannibal chuckles. He wants to give himself over to Hannibal, for him to do what he wants with Will. Hannibal bends over him as if he knows exactly what he was thinking. Hands begin unbuckling his belt, and Will isn’t even sure who’s hands they are.

He finds himself naked from the waist down. Surprised at the speed that Hannibal has been able to undress him, all he can do is hold onto Hannibal’s arms and whine.

There is a thud when Hannibal’s knees hit the floor, Will gasps when hot air brushes over his cock. Will looks down and meets Hannibal’s eyes, they are ringed in red. Will whines again. He wants Hannibal to touch him in anyway he deems fit.

Then warm heat envelopes his cock, and Will forgets to breathe for long moments. Hannibal guides one of Will's hands to his hair, and for a moment Will marvels at the silky threads that glide through his fingers. Will strokes over his head until he grasps one of the antlers. Hannibal moans around him and Will moans in turn.

Hannibal pulls up and presses a kiss to the head of his cock. Will tightens his grip on Hannibal's antler when Hannibal bobs his head down again until Will can feel himself hit the back of Hannibal's throat. "Fuck Hannibal."

He chuckles and resumes his efforts. Will can only hold on for dear life. The coil in his lower stomach begins to twist tighter and tighter. He is so agonisingly close. He knows that he is chanting something, he thinks it might by Hannibal's name and versions of "fuck me" but he isn't coherent enough to know fully what is happening. He feels warm all over, like he is having a fever and only Hannibal's touch can soothe him. His entire world has shrunk to his hand holding onto Hannibal, and Hannibal's mouth on him. When Hannibal presses a finger inside him Will comes with a shout.

Hannibal keeps suckling at him, while pressing the finger against his prostate, until it borders on pain, and Will moans. He should have known that Hannibal would be someone that would push him further than he thought possible.

Hannibal draws back gently, until his cock falls from Hannibal's lips. Hannibal twists his finger one more time before he withdraws it. Will watches in fuzzy disbelief as Hannibal licks his finger and closes his eyes in obvious contentment. "I should prefer a feast in your honor that is able to complement the way you taste."

Will flushes, and feels his cock twitch. Hannibal has awoken something in him that he didn't think was possible, this hunger for another person and their touch. Will releases Hannibal's antler and pushes himself up on his elbows and reaches for Hannibal's trousers, but Hannibal makes a noise and Will withdraws his hands.

"Another time, my love."

Will is too fuzzy to really understand that but he relents. "It just feels a little unfair. You give me so much and I have so little to offer."

Hannibal kisses him then, Will can taste himself and he moans again, a hand grasping at Hannibal's arm. "You give me more than enough, just by being here." Hannibal whispers into the space between them.

"Now, dinner will be ready. Why don't you get dressed and join me in the dining room and we can eat."

Hannibal leaves him, and Will feels bereft. Slowly he pulls on his clothes, but instead of going into the dining room he walks to the kitchen. Sure that he cannot spend less than a minute without Hannibal.

After dinner Hannibal gives him a beautifully wrapped tie. Will thinks it will look wrong with his own shirt but Hannibal assures him that it will fit his wardrobe perfectly.

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Watching Hannibal save a man's life, knowing that he could just as easily end, is like he is watching a God at work. Will supposes that is somewhat close to the truth. It makes Will want to sink to his knees in front of him and offer all he can. He fights the urge to do that, watches instead. Will realises then that he loves Hannibal and it hits him with so much force that he feels dizzy.

Hannibal catches his eye, like he knows what Will is thinking and gives him a small smile. Will wishes then that they could leave soon, he doesn't know how much longer he can go on.

# Chapter 4

Will wakes with a start, he is completely drenched in both sweat and something else. His thighs are sticky, some of it is his own come he is sure of it, but there is another substance he just can't explain. He had been dreaming about Hannibal finally fucking him. It had been all consuming, with Hannibal's cock inside him and his teeth in his neck.

His phone rings, and Will answers, Jack is on the end of the line telling him that Gideon had escaped. Will thinks that Hannibal is finally setting his plan into motion.

Will tells Jack that he will be there in an hour. He jumps into the shower, tempted to relieve his aching cock, instead he turns the water to cold until his erection calms down.

He arrives at the scene of the bloody prison transport van. Once he arrives Jack clears the scene for him and Will falls back into Gideon's mindset. It still feels like he is not entirely sure of himself, like he is still trying to wear the Ripper's mantle.

When Will exits the van Jack approaches him. "Does Gideon still believe he's the Chesapeake Ripper?"

"Abel Gideon's having a difference of opinion regarding who he is."

"This is either Kabuki or some dissociative identity disorder."

"Whoever did that," he gestures at the bloody van, "was not in the same state of mind who did this."

They are underneath a tree, the tree has various organs that are hanging there, tied with arteries. It certainly has the theatricality that Hannibal may have used himself. Although it lacks the artistry that Hannibal is so fond of.

The corpses of the other passengers are sat at the base of the tree. Beverly, Price and Zeller are inspecting the various organs.

Gideon had been able to give each of the victims atherectomies with the contents of the first aid kits. The veins had then been used to hang the organs from the branches. Gideon had taken the weapons from the guards as well as a uniform. The only thing he hadn't taken had been the organs. Even Jack knows that the Ripper would never have left a scene without at least one organ to keep, it's obvious then that Gideon is not the Ripper, even to Jack. .

Jack looks concerned and frustrated. Will understands that Jack is worried what havoc Gideon may wreck in his quest to find himself.

When Will is alone in his car he sends Hannibal a message. Hannibal replies within moments, telling him to start making arrangements for his dogs. That wrenches something in Will but he knows that he must. So Will starts the process of ringing people he knows

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Chilton is sat at his desk, seems happy to be separate from everyone else. Alana is bristling at Will's side.

"I suppose this is my fault, too." Chilton is completely glib and content in his position.

"You did dodge a bullet. Gideon's escape forgoes a trial. And a very public humiliation for you."

"Now you're hosting a private one. Next you'll be accusing me of arranging his escape."

Alana is furious even as she tries to calm Chilton down. Will is happy to let her take the lead in this conversation, if he has someone else convinced of Chilton's possibility of being the Ripper the more credible the pieces will appear to be.

Even as Chilton tries to diffuse the blame from himself it is obvious that he is only making it worse for himself. As the staunch denials of any wrongdoing echo so false. Chilton insists instead that he was helping Gideon understand.

"What did you help him understand?" Will asks, trying to back him into a corner.

"He wasn't insane when he killed his wife. Killing her drove him insane. He dissociated from the previous murders he committed. I didn't convince him he's a serial killer. I just reminded him of the fact."

Will knows that Chilton is actually making Hannibal's case stronger now. "Gideon is not the Chesapeake Ripper although he may have thought he was while under your care, *Doctor*. "

Alana jumps in, "whether he is or he isn't doesn't matter right now. If he thinks he is or even if he's confused on that issue, he will kill again."

Chilton rocks back in his chair. "I hope he doesn't for your sake. Can't imagine how you'd sleep with that on your shoulders."

"How did you sleep after Gideon killed your nurse?"

"They thought he was unconscious. The attendant left the nurse alone for three minutes. And in those three minutes Dr. Gideon did horrible things. I am less responsible for that nurse's death than the attendant's small bladder."

Will knows that he needs to shift the conversation to finding Gideon, as otherwise he is almost certain that Alana and Chilton are going to start arguing properly.

"What does Gideon want?" Will asks.

"Last thing Abel Gideon said to me was he intended to tell everyone he's the Chesapeake Ripper."

"He just wasn't intending to do it in court."

Chilton dismisses them then, and Will knows that it will look suspicious to Alana who is already dubious on Chilton's method.

Once they are in the car, Will turns to her and says, "I need to ask you for a favor."

"What is it?"

"I think you may have been right about me collecting too many strays."

Alana smiles and Will presses on. "Would you be willing to take one of them?"

"Of course. More than one if needed."

"You are a lifesaver. I know Buster and Zoe would work for you. If you have a yard, they're small dogs and hang onto each other."

"I quite liked the look of Harley too."

"She's a gentle giant." Will smiles, it's easier knowing they are going to a good home. "I promise they are all well behaved."

"Will I have seen you with those dogs, they are exceptionally well trained."

"Are you looking to adopt all of them out."

"I think losing three will be enough for now."

***

Jack tells him to wait in the car but he knows that there is little he can do. He knows that Chilton is in that observatory, but there might be something else that could happen.

Will sees something move in the distance, and he gets out of the car and climbs into the back seat. Pulling on gloves and then unholstering his weapon. Gidon slides into the seat and Will raises his gun.

"I was expecting the Chesapeake Ripper. Or are you him?"

"Turn around. Don't look at me."

"You look a little peaky, Mr Graham. Who is your doctor?"

Will does feel feverish with the need to see Hannibal. "Drive."

They arrive at Hannibal's house and Hannibal opens the door at Will's knock.

"Hello Will." Hannibal says with a smile, he only glances at Gideon briefly. "Hello Dr Gideon."

"Been a long time since someone's called me that."

“Won’t you come in?” Hannibal says as he makes space for Gideon and Will to enter. Hannibal squeezes Will’s shoulder as he passes. Will leans into the touch, he still feels feverish.

“Everything alright?”

“It will be.” Will says resolutely.

They push Gideon into the dining room. And Gideon sits down in the seat they direct them to.

“Are you the man who claimed to be the Chesapeake Ripper?” Hannibal is watching Gideon with strong revulsion.

“Why do you say claimed?” Gideon asks.

“Because you’re not. You know you’re not and you don’t know much more about who you are beyond that.” Gideon’s smile falls from his face. “A terrible thing to have your identity taken from you.”

Hannibal sits down at the table opposite Gideon. “I’m taking it back one piece at a time. You should see the pieces I got out of my psychiatrist.”

“Chilton drove you to this.”

“Did he now?” Gideon says with a wry grin. “I am not so sure. Dr Bloom may have been fishing.”

Hannibal shakes his head. “She wasn’t fishing, she only took the lines you were casting. It’s plain as day. Dr Chilton was so desperate to further his career, he would go to great lengths to prove that he had caught the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Will cannot keep his eyes from Hannibal.

“How convenient for Dr Chilton. To have someone he could place the blame on. After all, no evidence was ever found in the Ripper’s scenes. He was very careful of that.”

“Are you suggesting what I think you’re suggesting?” Gideon is looking between Hannibal and Will.

“Now, now, Dr Gideon, that is a bold assumption to make. You see we have long held reason to believe that Dr Chilton has been trying to find someone to take the fall.”

“Then why did Mr Graham lead me here?” Gideon sounds more unsure than he ever has.

“Because I’m going to help you remember.” Hannibal looks to Will. “could you fetch the box that is on my desk in the study?”

Will nods, even though he doesn’t want to be away from Hannibal. Having been in a room with Hannibal had made him feel dizzy, like all he can do is breathe in Hannibal. The entire

house feels like him, so it soothes him a little, but it is nothing compared to the warmth of his presence.

When he returns with the box, Hannibal takes it from him with a smile, his hands resting on Will's wrist for a moment, Will has to suppress a moan.

"You might want to go lie down Will. You look a little feverish." Hannibal says after examining him. Hannibal turns to Gideon. "You will stay here, won't you."

"I am intrigued enough for now."

Hannibal smiles with his teeth, and Will thinks that Gideon has no idea that he is swimming in shark-infested waters.

A hand appears in his back and Hannibal leads him up the stairs. Will assumes that Hannibal will take him to the guest room but Hannibal takes him to what can only be his bedroom. There is a samurai armor guarding the door, and Will thinks that it suits Hannibal. "How many people get to see this?"

"Not many at all." Will can't help the flair of jealousy. Hannibal chuckles, "I can assure that it was only when touring the house and nothing more."

Will is only somewhat mollified by that statement. Hannibal leads him to the bed, and pulls back the covers. "Go on, lie down. I will get you when you know when I have news for you."

He only nods and watches as Hannibal leaves the room. The need for Hannibal to be in the room is lessened by the scent of Hannibal all around him. Will burrows his head into the pillow where Hannibal's scent is strongest. He still feels too hot so he strips out of his clothes and then pulls the sheets over him.

Will falls asleep to the scent of Hannibal all around him.

***

He wakes with a warm presence at his back, he turns his head slightly to find Hannibal pressed against his back. An arm is holding him close and Will relaxes into it.

"What will happen now?"

"I imagine you will get a phone call soon."

"I'm much too comfortable for Jack to call me."

Hannibal holds him close, and then grasps Will's chin in his other hand and turns him so he can kiss him. Will whimpers into the kiss, and Hannibal traces his teeth with his tongue. The kiss turns heated and Will presses his ass back against Hannibal. He can feel that Hannibal is hard against him and he grinds his hips, trying to urge him on. He wants nothing more than to have Hannibal fuck him.

"Not yet." Hannibal says as he stills Will's hips with the hand that is splayed over his chest.

Will whines. “When?”

“When we are safe.”

Will nods slowly, he supposes he can wait, even as his body tells him that he can’t wait. Hannibal presses another kiss against his lips.

Then his phone rings. “You had better answer that.”

Will presses the answer button when he has retrieved it from the night table. “Hello?”

“Will, we found Miriam.”

Will looks at Hannibal who only smiles. “Do you need me?”

“No. Maybe.” Jack pauses. “Not yet. I will call you when I do.”

Will drops the phone onto the bed. “That will ruin him.”

“I needed him on edge.”

“I know, but I can’t help but feel that Jack was responsible for bringing us together.”

“And that is why he will get his Ripper and has Miriam back.”

“To be able to rest his head even after Bella is gone.”

“I can never quite predict how wonderfully your mind is able to make connections.”

Will doesn’t say anything else, but he presses a kiss to Hannibal’s lips.

He wants to fall asleep again, but he knows that there is something else. “What about Gideon?”

“He will turn himself in, another piece in the puzzle against Chilton.”

“How did you manage that?”

“I only undid some of the work that Chilton had done poorly. Then reforged some connections.”

“I should be terrified of you.”

“Yes you should. But luckily for you I will never harm you.”

“Even if I want you to?”

“Oh you wicked boy.” Hannibal is looking at him with such fierce fondness. “Now sleep. The puzzle will still be there tomorrow.”

Will falls back into sleep with Hannibal holding him close.

***

The next morning, Jack calls him again. They had managed to secure the cabin where she had been kept.

Will realises then that he would be returning to work in the same clothes that he had left the last scene in. He mentions this to Hannibal who leaves him for long moments and returns with clothes.

The fact that Hannibal has clothes for him makes him feel owned, something that Will is realising that he likes a great deal. He goes into the bathroom at Hannibal's urging to shower. The bathroom is far nicer than anything Will has ever seen, there is a tub in the center of the room that looks large enough for two. Will has the image of riding Hannibal in the bath. His cock throbs in his boxers, and he palms himself to take the edge off, but it does little to assuage his arousal. He wonders briefly if Hannibal can smell him.

Will strips out of his t-shirt and boxers and steps into the shower. There are far too many jets to contend with in his sleep-drunk state. So Will just cranks on the largest dial and lets it run hot. The water pounds on his shoulders and it soothes some of the ache of sleeping in a new position. He fumbles for products to clean himself with, realising then that he will smell like Hannibal all day.

Will grasps his cock and strokes himself slowly. He knows he has slightly longer than if he were at home, as he is closer to the crime scenes.

He fucks into the tunnel of his fist, imagining Hannibal's hands on him the entire time.

He rinses off and then wrapped in a towel goes back into the bedroom, Hannibal is getting dressed but he watches Will with hungry eyes, following the drops of water as they make their way down his body. Will grins and drops his towel. He feels Hannibal's hands on his hips and something about this position feels almost right.

Will sinks to his knees, his ass high in the air. Hannibal follows him down to the floor, his legs bracketing Will's. His brain lights up with the rightness of this position. He thinks it would be so easy for Hannibal to just slide into him. He circles his hips, desperate for anything.

Then fingers slide into him. For a moment he considers whether Hannibal had wet his fingers somehow as they slide in so easily but the thought flies out of his head as soon as Hannibal crooks his fingers and presses against his prostate.

"Hannibal." Will sighs, his head dropping to the floor.

Hannibal teases him with his fingers, petting from inside and outside with his fingers. It's like Hannibal knows exactly where and how to touch him to have him so close to orgasm even after an orgasm just moments ago.

Hannibal is whispering praise into his ear as he touches him. Will is incoherent with pleasure. The pressure builds and builds and it seems like Hannibal is holding on him just off the edge

of the precipice. He is chanting “more” as he rocks his hips.

A third finger is pushed into him and Will comes, he can feel himself clench around Hannibal's fingers who purrs into his ear. He wishes that he is clenching around Hannibal’s cock and feel him coming inside him.

Will is sure that he blacks out for a moment because he comes to with Hannibal’s fingers still inside him, his body shuddering with aftershocks. “You did so well.” Hannibal murmurs and Will shudders again.

Slowly Hannibal withdraws his fingers, and Will can hear Hannibal lick his fingers clean. Will wants to ask why but he is too dazed to.

Hannibal wipes Will down with his towel and then turns Will onto his back. “I think you ought to get dressed.”

“I think you’re going to have to give me 5 minutes.”

“Enough time to finish making breakfast.”

“How do you do it?”

“Planning mylimasis.” Hannibal says as he presses a kiss to Will’s lips and leaves the room.

Will pulls on the clothes Hannibal had left for him. They fit like a glove, definitely more fitted than anything that Will would have picked out for himself, but they feel so nice on his sensitive skin.

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Will arrives at a barn, Jack only gives him a quick once over as if he doesn’t quite know what is different about Will. Once they step inside they go downstairs to a basement that is filled with cisterns. It is lit by work lights that creates unnatural shadows everywhere, all leading to a coffin-sized freezer.

The floor is covered in linoleum, so that it is easy to clean, ontop the linoleum is an autopsy table just like the ones that are in the halls of Quantico. The equipment that litters the table is medical grade.

“The Chesapeake Ripper’s most recent victim drowned in this cistern. The water in his lungs led us here.”

Above each cistern, a block and tackle hangs from a hook in the ceiling. Jack points to a dry cistern, “we found Miriam down there.”

Jack looks exhausted. “She believes the Ripper brought her here to kill her. He was saving her to be his last victim. He knows we’re close to catching him.”

“He’s been caught before. Catch a fish once and it gets away, it’s a lot harder to catch a second time.”

Jack sighs and falls quiet.

Will looks around the room, he can tell Hannibal has indeed used this place, feels it in every inch of the room. Will looks at Jack and says, “It’s theater.”

“Every time the Chesapeake Ripper kills, it’s theater.” Jack adds.

“The Chesapeake Ripper didn’t bring Miriam here to kill her. He brought her here for you to find.”

“The Ripper isn’t self-destructive. He doesn’t want to get caught.”

“Maybe he is wanting to distract away from Gideon, and wants to torment you.”

“I feel like he is just out of reach.”

“We’ll get him Jack.”

***

Will only has Winston left, his house feels so empty without seven bodies inside, and he misses Hannibal like a body part has been taken from him. He spends the evenings when he doesn’t see Hannibal on the phone to him. Hannibal is still coy about the details about his plans but he assures Will that it is getting ever closer.

One morning Will wakes to his phone ringing, it’s Jack.

“Morning.”

“Gideon turned himself in.”

“Do you need me to interview him?”

“I think that would be best, he asked for you and Dr Bloom. It seems you left an impression on him last time you spoke.”

“Give me an hour.”

“Hurry.”

Will sends Hannibal a message, although he is sure that Hannibal is already aware of the fact that Gideon is in custody.

He arrives in the interview room of the halls in Quantico. Gideon is sat chained to one of the desks, and Will watches him through the two-way mirror. The man seems far more certain than Will has ever seen him.

When Alana joins him in the room, she looks exhausted. Jack has never been known as someone who has much respect for someone’s time, especially when it is about the Ripper.

Will cannot wait till Hannibal and he can leave, because it means that he doesn't have to deal with this any longer.

"So Gideon has resurfaced." Alana says after a beat.

"It would seem that way."

"He looks better somehow."

"He does, like the effects of Dr Chilton's therapy aren't quite as helpful as imagined."

"Well it's now or never."

"Lead the way Alana."

Will follows her into the room, Gideon looks at them and smiles. "Mr Graham, Dr Bloom. It's a pleasure."

"Why don't you tell us why you chose to turn yourself in?" Alana asks.

"It was simple, I was getting bored of being alone. And life is so difficult to navigate when you're on the lam."

"You seem calmer, has Dr Chilton's therapy begun to wear off?"

"Dr Chilton, now that is a strange man." Gidon leans back in his chair, in almost a mirror image of when Will had last spoken to Chilton. "You know it feels like the voice inside my head sounds exactly like him."

Will can relate, the voice inside his head sounds like Hannibal, but he doesn't want it in any other way.

"Care to elaborate?" Alana probes. Will knows that the more Alana is the one that pieces things together the more believable it seems.

"You must understand, I know I killed my wife and I meant that. I know that this is the reason I ended up in that place."

Alana is regarding Gideon with open curiosity. "What happened then?"

"The BSHCI mandates therapy with a licenced professional. Dr Chilton was my therapist. At first those sessions were like any other I had ever had."

"Did he ever tell you whether he started in psychiatry?" Will asks, this is one of the crucial elements of the profile for the Chesapeake Ripper.

"He did not. Like so many of us who became doctors, he started as wanting to work in surgery. Cardiothoracic surgeon to be exact."

"Is that so?" Alana has caught the bait.

“Yes, from what he told me, he was good too. Even as a resident. Then a year into his residency he realised that there was more money in psychiatry. Dr Chilton always seemed obsessed with status that came from money.” Gideon leans in close. “You have to see I don’t remember much after about 6 months into my stay.”

“What do you remember?”

“Lights, that’s what I remember, every time I had a session with Dr Chilton it feels like the room was just light, and all I could hear is a voice.”

“Tell me, Gideon, do you think that Dr Chilton was manipulating you?” Will asks in a hushed tone, he can tell that Alana is hanging on to his every word.

“Now that I am away from his clutches, it seems almost certain that he did. As I alluded to before, but it is easier to identify now that I don’t hear his voice quite so loudly.”

“Thank you, Gideon.” Alana says earnestly and she stands. Will follows her back out of the room.

When they return to behind the mirror, Jack is waiting for them.

“Dr Chilton, is it possible?” Alana asks when she sees him.

“What do you think Will?”

“I mean I have always found Chilton to be a narcissist and we have always said that the Ripper needed to have surgical knowledge.”

“I’ll have Katz look into Chilton’s background.”

Alana is looking between them, “Dr Chilton has always seemed like someone who thought people were beneath them.”

“That fits too.” Will agrees. He turns to Jack. “you have another witness.”

“But what about the fact that Gideon mutilated Dr Chilton?” Jack seems reluctant to involve Miriam any further.

“I don’t know, if I was manipulated so long, told to believe that I was someone that I wasn’t, at some point that belief would override other things.”

“I’ve seen it before Jack.” Alana adds. “Sometimes those that underwent trauma and abuse eventually became abusers themselves.”

Jack sighs. “Dr Chilton is still in hospital recovering.”

“You said that all Miriam remembered was a voice, maybe you could play her a recording?” Will probes gently.

“That could be an option. And maybe she can see him through a window.”

“Think about it Jack. This might be the closest we’ve ever come to him.” Will says gently.

“I know. It just seems like it’s all coming together for once, and it’s been a long time.”

“A long and arduous journey.” Alana says with a gentle smile.

“It has been.”

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Miriam’s eyes dart around the room, as Will watches from behind the mirror. It seemed like a good idea for only Jack to be in the same room as her.

Her eyes are filled with tears, and Jack is looking at her with a strange mix of relief and guilt.

“I knew you’d never stop looking.” She looks at him with such profound relief that it is hard not to be affected by it. “Can I see him?”

“The Ripper?” She nods. “We haven’t caught him yet.”

“He’s still-?” she trails off, she looks frustrated and scared.

“We need your help, Miriam. You know who he is.”

“I don’t. Know who he is.”

“You found him.”

“I don’t remember finding him. He got inside my head.”

“Do you remember being taken?”

“I remember a dream about drowning. Then being awake. And not awake. Being myself, and not myself. I remember I could smell salt air. We were by the sea. For weeks. Months. Longer. Days and evenings blurred, I’d wake up to the smell of fresh flowers and the sting of a needle.” She pauses, tears are now spilling down her cheeks. “I wasn’t afraid. Fear and pain were so far away, on the horizon, but not close. Never close.”

Jack looks regretful. “I was reckless with your life.”

“I was reckless with my life.”

“I saw what I needed in you and I used you. I let you break the rules on my behalf while I hit behind deniability.”

“Please, Agent Crawford. Don’t apologize to me for my mistakes.” She looks wistful. “He treated me very well until the end. Until he put me in the ground. Even when he took my arm. He told me what he was going to do. I went to sleep. I woke up, it was gone. Said it was giving it to you.”

“Did he tell you why?” Jack is agonized, Will can hear it in every word he says.

“He said he wanted to give you hope.”

“Can you identify him?

“I could hear his voice. I couldn’t see his face. All I could see is light.”

Jack tenses at that, clearly remembering Gideon making the same statement.

“I have something that you could listen to, maybe it’s him.”

“I can try, I want to help.”

“I know, Miriam, I know.” Jack says sadly. It was after all what led her to being taken.

Jack presses play on the little recorder. Chilton’s voice blares through the room.

Will watches as Miriam’s remaining arm twitches to where her holster would have been.

“It’s him. It’s the Ripper.” She whispers, her eyes wide with fright.

Jack pauses the recording and then says, “you’re safe Miriam. No one is going to harm you again.”

He turns to look at Will through the glass and nods.

Will phones Hannibal when he gets home, “Jack is going to take Miriam to see Chilton tomorrow.”

“Good. Then there is nothing you need to do except for you to draft your resignation and pack.”

“I still have Winston.” Will says slowly. He has been hanging on for the longest time to this last member of his pack.

“Is he well behaved?” Hannibal asks, he sounds like he was expecting this to happen.

“He is.” Will says hopefully, even though Hannibal isn’t there, Will finds himself showing his neck as though to appease him.

“Then bring him here, I think the best thing for you to do is spend the last few days here with me.”

Will finds himself making a purring noise, similar to what Hannibal does to soothe him sometimes. “And Will, you don’t need to bring much. I can provide for you entirely.”

That sends the familiar warmth through him. Being with Hannibal feels like being claimed in every sense of the word, he knows that he has nothing to worry about because Hannibal will provide him with everything.

When he hangs up, Will begins packing the things he knows he cannot part with, it is only a few sentimental items and books.

Will loads up his car with the scant belongings and Winston who watches him with excitement, his tale wagging and he is panting.

He gets in the car and drives towards his new life.

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Jack calls him in the morning, telling him he wants Will to be in the hospital when Miriam sees Chilton. Will rises with a sigh, he doesn't want to leave the warm embrace of Hannibal.Surprisingly Hannibal rises with him, and follows him downstairs. When he sees that Will is only making himself a coffee he tuts and makes breakfast for Will.

Once he is fed and watered Hannibal leads him to the door and presses a kiss against his lips.

Will smiles, "will you walk Winston today?"

"Of course, my love." Hannibal looks down at the dog that has followed them to the door. "He is rather an extraordinary dog."

"That he is." Will says with a laugh and then presses one more kiss against his lips. He gets into his car to drive to the hospital.

Jack is waiting for him with Miriam at the entrance to the hospital. The mood is solemn and hesitant, and Will gets into the headspace of someone who is finally getting the answer to all the questions that he has had.

He follows them to the ward where Chilton is currently staying, he had been moved out of the ICU a few days earlier, and is apparently able to walk around a little. They go into the observatory room that looks into the room.

At Jack's nod the nurse opens the blinds, and Miriam turns to look at Chilton. The doctor is currently being helped to walk around the room by an attendant. Miriam cries out, and once again she tries to reach for a gun that isn't there.

"Jack, it's him." She whispers, her eyes darting around the room.

Then everything happens all at once, she darts for Jack who is so shocked that he freezes. She grabs the gun from Jack and shoots it through the window.

Will watches in fascination as the glass shatters and then a dark red spot spreads on Chilton's chest, he sinks to the floor. Will jumps on Miriam and tackles her to the floor. She drops the gun before they have even hit the floor. She is sobbing openly.

The hospital is filled with noise and Will wants nothing more than to let go of Miriam, her touch doesn't feel quite as terrible as it would have been before he had met Hannibal.

Jack kneels down beside them and Will lets go of Miriam, Jack gathers her up in his arms and rocks her gently, shushing her. Will is struck that Jack would have been a good father. The thought of parenthood makes him miss Hannibal all over again.

The nurse re-enters the room and she plunges a syringe into Miriam's arm, she calms down almost instantly. Jack releases her and lets the nurse take her away.

There is little Will can do but stand up slowly. "There we have it."

"Enough to get a search warrant at least." Jack agrees, he looks conflicted for a moment but then clears up slightly. "That's 2 positive IDs, any judge will give me a search warrant."

Will sighs, "I guess this isn't a good time to tell you, I'm leaving."

"You're leaving?" Jack turns on him with a thunderous look.

"You told me once, that if I wanted to quit I should. So that's what I'm doing."

"You can't go." Jack says slowly.

"Jack, I have to. I almost lost my grip on reality for this job." Will sighs and rubs at his temples. "I'm quitting teaching as well. I need to get away from here."

"Where will you go?"

"Hannibal is going to show me Europe."

"Hannibal?" Jack looks shocked.

"He and I have become fast friends over the months as we got to know each other. He knows I need a break and he knows Europe well."

"When?"

"A matter of days, I imagine. Now that we have found the Ripper, the biggest hunt of your life is over."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No. Jack, you have to understand my mind is made up."

"What about the trial?"

"I will send you my notes, a trial rarely requires the entire team."

"I just don't understand why."

"I'm tired Jack. Looking at killers is like ripping myself apart every single time." Will sticks out his hand, and tries not to grimace when Jack shakes it. "Thank you Jack, for everything."

With that Will leaves the hospital and leaves for Quantico. Once there he turns in his badge and gun and hands his resignation to the administrators for the classes. She nods at him, like she was expecting him to.

Finally Will heads to the lab, where Beverly is chatting to the rest of the team. He tells them he's leaving. Beverly looks at him for long moments and then pulls him close and wishes him good luck.

Then he heads back to Hannibal's.

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In the end untangling the last of his life is easy with Hannibal's help. His house is sold quickly. He'll miss his little safe house, that was a safety net for him for such a long time. But Hannibal feels like safety to him now, so it is easy to let him guide Will through the process of tidying up.

Once the last things that hold him to his old life are gone, Abigail joins them for one final dinner at Hannibal's house. Hannibal shoos them both from the kitchen so he can prepare a feast.

Abigail and Will go into Hannibal's study, it is almost barren. They had sorted through Hannibal's effects only the previous day. It doesn't look right, he knows that like him Hannibal has packed up only the things he wants to keep. But that had been a far greater amount than what he had needed. All he really needs is Hannibal, Abigail and Winston. Winston is curled in front of the fire, surprisingly Hannibal had taken a liking to the dog, and Winston had all but deserted Will for Hannibal.

Now that Abigail is in the house though, Winston seems content to follow her around. She sits down by the fire next to Winston, who lifts his head to rest it in her lap. "I'm excited."

"Me too." Will sits beside them both. The fire warms him, and he is perfectly happy in this moment. "A little nervous."

"I would be, but there is nothing but horror waiting for me here."

"There might be horror there too."

Abigail laughs, and takes one of Will's hands in hers. "But it will be horror of our own making rather than what other people do to us."

Will joins her in her laughter, and she leans against him. "Hannibal said you will be his Queen."

"He has mentioned it." Will says slowly. "But I'm not sure what that means."

"It's quite simple really." Abigail says with conspiratorial wink. "You'll bear his children."

Will splutters, "bear his children? But that's not possible."

"Hannibal hasn't told you everything has he?"

Will shakes his head. The thought of bearing Hannibal's children makes him fill with that longing for family that has been near constant since he met him.

“Well the Unseelie also have a secondary gender, one that is separate from the notions of gender we have. There are three, alpha, betas and omegas.”

Will listens to her with rapt attention. It rings true to him, even if he doesn’t fully understand what they entail.

“Betas are the most common, almost comparable to normal humans, men and women can be betas. But only men can be alphas and omegas. Omegas can bear Alpha’s children.”

Will reaches for his stomach, he wants life to take root there. Imagines growing fat with Hannibal’s children. To spend his life by Hannibal’s side. He would give Will the most beautiful children. All sandy haired and strong. He wants it with every fibre of his being.

Abigail smiles at him like she knows what he is thinking, she squeezes the hand that is over his stomach. “You will have the most beautiful pups. And I will be there for my siblings.”

He pulls her close, because he has to. His first daughter, how he loves her. He presses a kiss to her forehead. He buries his face into her hair, holding on to her.

Hannibal finds them like that, cuddled in front of the fire, holding onto one another. He sinks to his knees in front of them and pulls them all close. This feels like home, Will’s cheeks feel wet with tears. Hannibal kisses them away before kissing Will. He purrs and it calms Will, makes him feel full of love.

“Dinner is ready. I have made a last feast for us all.”

They stand, Hannibal helps them all to stand, his hands on both of them. Will feels a little unsteady on his feet, the revelation still making his head spin, even though it fills him with joy.

The dining table is truly set for a feast, bright colors explode everywhere, flowers and skulls are used as decoration for three golden place settings. In the center of the table is a rack of lamb, the rib bones displayed like steeples of a church. It seems fitting that Hannibal would serve them a sacrificial lamb as the last offering in this world.

Hannibal leads Abigail to her seat first, to the left of the head of the table. Once she is seated, he presses a kiss to the top of her head and she beams at him. Then Hannibal takes Will’s hand to the seat to the right of him. He kisses Will once he has helped him into his seat.

The lamb is carved and served and then they start eating. It is of course delicious, like everything Hannibal makes.

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The next morning is spent in a steady hurry as Hannibal has the last few things that he has in his house be packed away. He assures Will that the items will always be available should they decide to reenter the mortal realm. Will thinks he doesn’t ever want to return, but he supposes that there will be a time when it might be nice to play with people.

He spends the entire time following Hannibal around the house, he tries to not get in the way, but he can't leave Hannibal out of his sights. It sets something off dark and panicked in him, as though Hannibal doesn't want him.

Hannibal in turns spends a lot of time touching Will, especially his neck which Will keeps presenting to him. Hannibal will rub at the spot behind his neck that always feel good to have touched, now it itches when Hannibal isn't putting pressure on it, all he wants Hannibal's teeth to bite down, but he can't quite explain the urge.

Finally Hannibal deems them ready and everyone gets into the car, Hannibal drives them for a few hours, until they arrive at the edge of a forest. Each mile that they get closer Hannibal seems to get a little closer to that figure he had present to Will so long ago in his study.

Once they get out Will is surprised by how cool the air is, like a spring morning, he thinks it's fitting somehow for their rebirth into this new world.

Winston is sniffing at the edge of the forest with a wagging tail, Abigail is watching him with a smile on her face. She looks happier than Will had thought possible from when he had met her.

Hannibal watches them for long moments before he takes the few items they had packed and unloads them. He whistles and figures appear. A voice cries out, "Hannibal you have returned to us."

Hannibal laughs, before Will's eyes, his clothes change to the robes that he had worn in all of Will's dreams. He looks beautiful and Will gasps, the figure turns to him then.

"You have brought a Queen."

"I have." Hannibal says slowly. One approaches Will and he shies away from them, Hannibal growls and everyone freezes.

"I see, you are entering the mating heat."

Will turns to Hannibal, "mating heat?"

"I will explain later, but first we have to see everyone else, and introduce you."

Will nods, and approaches Hannibal. Just the thought of someone else touching him makes his skin crawl like it has so often. Hannibal opens an arm for him and Will tucks himself against his side. The arm holds him close as they walk into the forest.

There is a point, once they are deep in the forest that for a moment the air falls silent. Save for their footsteps on the ground. The air feels different, sweeter somehow. And it is like flowers bloom out of nowhere.

"You were right." Will whispers.

"I am about many things, but what exactly was I right about this time?"

“This is beautiful.”

“It will only get more beautiful from here on out.”

Will’s heart leaps at the thought, he doesn’t know how anything could be more beautiful than this. For the first time he feels as though he is truly at home, even Wolf Trap paled in comparison to this place. The air shimmers, and it almost seems like that he could see through to the world that they had just left.

He looks over to Abigail who is skipping with a smile on her face, Winston is baying at her feet, his tongue lolling from his mouth. Will feels a swell in his heart, knowing that she will be the best older sibling to any children he bears for Hannibal, and Winston will be their fearsome protector.

“She is perfect, isn’t she?” Hannibal says, he presses a kiss to the stop of Will’s head, and Will leans more heavily against him.

“Our first daughter.” Will agrees, he is surprised that Hannibal feels like a true companion that knows him so well that it feels like there is nothing between them. “A miracle that her father is the reason you finally found me.”

“A miracle? Or maybe just fate?”

“It is possible that either is true, but I don’t care. All I know is that you found and saved me.”

Hannibal purrs, and Will feels an answering noise trill in his throat. Hannibal’s arm tightens around him.

The group comes to a stop, and Hannibal uses his other arm to brush away some vines to reveal a clearing. Will gasps, it is the most beautiful thing Will has ever seen. There are huts that seem as though they grew with the trees.

There are plants everywhere, there is a darkness to the place that only highlights its beauty. Figures appear along the path that leads away from where they are. There is cheering in the air as they walk through the crowds.

Will tries to hide his face in Hannibal’s side, but Hannibal keeps him facing the crowd. “Show them, what a worthy Queen you are.”

He breathes in deeply, it feels like it is the first time he can properly smell Hannibal, pine and smoke. The scent calms him, even as it makes the fire inside him burn hotter. There is so much that he wants to do, but there are too many people around them. Will stands straighter, Hannibal’s arm remains on the small of his back, rubbing small circles there.

They approach the dais in the middle of the clearing, there are two thrones there, they look like they have been carved out of antlers. Someone approaches Hannibal and Will, Hannibal steps forward to stop them from getting too close to Will. They give Hannibal a crown of flowers, it is similar to the one that Hannibal wears but there are more blues and golds in the crown than in Hannibal’s.

Hannibal leads Will to sit down on one of the thrones. The crowd forms a circle around the dais, chanting fills the air. Even though he cannot quite understand the words, he understands the meaning. They are offering the fealty to him as Queen, and Hannibal looks at him with a question in his eyes.

Will nods and Hannibal beams at him. He places the crown on Will's head and then kneels before him. He presses a kiss to Will's hand and then his lips. Will sighs into the kiss. It feels different somehow, when Hannibal traces the seam of his lips with his tongue, Will can taste Hannibal and he deepens the kiss. His arms snake around Hannibal, to hold him close.

The chanting reaches a crescendo and then stops abruptly. Hannibal pulls away from him and smiles at him. He holds up a mirror to Will. He has antlers, just like Hannibal. Although his are white. What is more surprising is that his irises' are ringed in gold.

"It is time." A voice cries out, and Will jumps. He has no idea what it is time for, but Hannibal takes his hand, and helps him to his feet.

"Trust me?"

"Always."

"Close your eyes."

Will closes his eyes, and then Hannibal strokes his hands over Will's chest and Will leans into the touch, then Hannibal is unbuttoning his shirt. "What are you doing?"

"Let me do this. To be their Queen you have to let go of everything from your past life."

Will nods, and then Hannibal is undressing him. Each brush of his hands over each bared inch of skin makes him feel that familiar curl of arousal coil in his stomach. Then he is bared to the world. His skin flushes, the group must see him as not fit to be his Queen. "You are perfect." Hannibal whispers against his lips.

Then a robe is draped over his shoulders and fastened in a few places over his chest. The material is soft and malleable like silk. It smells a little like Hannibal and he breathes in deeply. His arousal curls higher, and he whimpers. Hannibal brushes a hand over his cheek. "Soon, my love. Now open your eyes and look onto your people."

Will opens his eyes and looks at the people thronging the scene. They look at him with so much love that he feels it in every fibre of his being. It is something different to the love that Hannibal feels for him, and it fills him with a different warmth.

Hannibal takes his hand and leads him from the dais and to a hut just behind it. The door closes behind him, and all Will can smell is Hannibal. His skin feels slick with sweat. There is a dampness between his legs that he can't explain.

"Now, I promised that I would explain what the mating heat is."

Will nods, Hannibal prowls towards him and Will backs away until his knees hit the edge of his bed. He collapses down onto it, Hannibal looming over him.

“I know Abigail told you about Omegas and Alphas.”

“She did. She alluded to the fact that I was an Omega. I could bear your children.”

“You can.”

“I want that, Hannibal more than anything else. Please Hannibal *breed* me.”

Hannibal growls before shaking his head. “You know I can smell your arousal. Have you ever wondered why that is?”

Will shakes his head, he can’t think of anything but being fucked by Hannibal until he is dripping with him.

Hannibal unclasps Will’s robe and then reaches between his thigh to his hole, to the dampness there. “You produce slick.”

He licks his fingers clean, “and it tastes like the very essence of you. Fertility and temptation itself.”

Will doesn’t have much coherence left to question what is happening. He shrugs out of his robes until he is bare in front of Hannibal. He leans back until he is spread over the bed and spreads his thighs. “Please Hannibal. I need you.”

“I know darling. You are going into heat.” Hannibal undoes his own robes and for the first time he is naked in front of Will. Will cannot look away, he is beautiful. Will knows that Hannibal will give him beautiful children. His eyes follow the tempting line of his hips to his cock. Hannibal is huge, and Will knows that Hannibal will fill him up so good. Right into that place that aches to be filled.

The ache to be filled becomes the only thought left in his head. Whines are forced from him, all he can think about is that Hannibal should be fucking him at this very moment and he isn’t.

“Present for me, sweet thing.” Hannibal’s command is clear, Will doesn’t immediately know what it means, but he lets instinct wash over him. He twists onto his front, bringing his knees and arms underneath him until his ass is lifted into the air.

“Perfect.” Hannibal purrs and then adjusts his posture with steady hands. He presses Will’s chest onto the bed, until his hips are canted upwards. “This will aid conception, and be more comfortable.”

Will can only whine, “Alpha.” Hannibal purrs again in answer. The title feels right in his mouth, just as the position makes him feel lax with the anticipation of pleasure. Hannibal’s hands dig into the spot above his tailbone.

“An Omega’s body has so many pressure points that can make you feel good.” His fingers trail upwards to Will’s neck, and dig into a spot at his nape. Will can feel his limbs get more relaxed. “Here is another, I could scruff you here, and you wouldn’t be able to move. But only someone you trust can get close enough to do so.”

Will hums, things aren't moving fast enough for him. Hannibal's hands aren't close enough, and the rest of him is so far away from him. Will whines again. "Alpha please."

"I've got you." Hannibal purrs as he lies down of Will, the pressure of his weight sends Will further into his need. It feels like his just a bundle of need, that needs Hannibal to do something.

Hannibal slowly lifts up and Will thinks that Hannibal has rejected him. He wants to cry, then Hannibal's hands take a hold of his ass. He spreads his cheeks until he is exposed to Hannibal's gaze. For the first time Will can feel the slick dribble out of him. It stains his thighs, then a blast of warm air blows over his fevered skin.

Will's hand grasps onto the bedding when he feels Hannibal's tongue lick over him. He buries his head into the pillow, embarrassed by the sounds that he is making. "No, mylimasis, I want to hear everything."

He lifts his head and lets the sounds flow out of his mouth. They are near constant, he is begging with every fibre of his being. He groans when he feels Hannibal's tongue dip into him. It feels like heaven but even that isn't enough. "More, more. Hannibal I need more."

A finger slides into him, and it only teases at the itch that is crawling under his skin. It is so close to what he needs. Tears are rolling down his cheeks, because Hannibal is still denying him. It is like his body knows exactly what he needs; for Hannibal to breed him.

Every inch of him feels like he is burning up, his mind is closing down to only one thing: Hannibal inside him. Hannibal presses a finger against his prostate and Will keens, slick is dripping onto the bed.

"Please Alpha. I need you now."

"I know, my love." Hannibal withdraws his fingers. Will almost screams because the emptiness feels so wrong.

Then Hannibal's cockhead slides through the wetness between his thighs before Hannibal pushes in. Will almost cries with relief, because finally Hannibal is inside him where he belongs. Hannibal thrusts forward  until his hips touch Will's ass. Like he thought Hannibal fills him up so good.

Hannibal sets a punishing pace, and Will can only hold onto the sheets with his hands. Noises are punched out of him as Hannibal thrusts into him. He is growling above Will, and it makes Will feel owned in every possible way. Hannibal grabs the back of his neck with a hand and Will purrs.

The sound of their skin slapping is obscene in the quiet of the room, but Will can't think of anything else that could be more perfect. Then suddenly it isn't enough. "More. I need more. He thinks he doesn't know else there could be, but he knows that he needs more.

"There. Is. Something. Else. You. Should. Know." Hannibal punctuates each word with a thrust that drives Will further up the bed.

Will only knows he has to have more. He whines. Something is butting up against his hole. He has a moment of panic, but Hannibal's hand digs into his neck and it soothes him.

"Alphas are made with a knot. So that I can tie you to me, to make sure that you are bred well."

Will understands then that that is what he is missing. He nods frantically. "Yesss. Alpha. Knot. Bite. Breed."

He is completely incoherent, his world has shrunk to Hannibal's cock in him and his hand on his neck.

Hannibal hunches over him, "if I bite you, you are going to be mine forever."

"Already yours." Will grinds out. He knows this so deep inside himself. Knew it from the moment he met him.

Hannibal thrusts twice more pushing his knot into Will, holding him at the widest parts for blissful seconds and then his knot swells inside Will, it butts up against his prostate, keeping pressure right where he needs it. In the same moment Hannibal bites into the spot on his neck behind his ear until Will can feel his skin tearing. Will comes with a scream. Clenching around the knot hard. Hannibal roars above him and Will can feel Hannibal release deep inside him.

Will comes again, it is almost painful now but he doesn't want it to ever end. Hannibal's teeth are still in his neck. Hormones douse his entire system, and it feels like Hannibal has carved out something inside his mind as well as his body.

Hannibal comes again, and Will moves a hand to his stomach, he is beginning to feel so full of Hannibal's come that his stomach is already distorting. WIll purrs, and Hannibal carefully removes the teeth from his neck and licks around the mark he has made. Will knows it will scar and it's all he wants. To be able to wear the mark proudly, high on his neck for everyone to see.

There is an answering purr from Hannibal, and Will's head begins to clear. The need is still there, but it has been sated by Hannibal being locked inside of him. Carefully Hannibal moves them until they are lying on their sides.

The movement jostles the knot inside Will and he comes again, dry this time. Each time he clenches around Hannibal, he can feel another load pump into him. Will cannot stop the purr that is coming from deep inside him.

Hannibal rests a hand on his belly. "You will be so stunning, heavy with my pups."

Will sighs happily. "I hope they look like you."

Hannibal laughs at that, it sends another shockwave of pleasure through WIll. He didn't know that he could come so often, but Hannibal seems to be able to draw something out of him.

Will nuzzles into Hannibal's arm beneath his head. "I am yours. And you are mine."

"As soon as my knot goes down, it would be my honor to wear your bite."

He purrs again and Will drifts slightly, his body finally content with the situation.

Will comes to when Hannibal slips out of him, followed by a gush of come and slick. He whines at that, but Hannibal is there and slowly fingers his come back into Will. That soothes him slightly. But the need begins to claw at his insides again.

Hannibal turns Will over, his eyes are ringed in red. And Will kisses him, finally able to taste his own slick on Hannibal. He tastes sweet. Hannibal's hand cups Will's cheek, and he licks at his fingers, the mixture of Hannibal's come and his slick is like ambrosia.

He licks at Hannibal's hand until the need is too great. He pushes at Hannibal's shoulder until Hannibal lies flat on his back. Will straddles his hips and Hannibal grins up at him. Will sinks onto him. This way Hannibal gets even deeper. Will gasps, because he can see his face flash through emotions. It makes Will feel powerful. Hannibal sits up and kisses Will. He draws back and then guides Will's mouth to his neck. Will inhales greedily, nosing along his neck.

"Make me yours." Hannibal grinds out. Will licks over a spot that is slightly raised and then Will bites down. His jaw works to tear through the skin until he can taste Hannibal's blood. It is like a more potent version of his scent that sits thick on his tongue.

Hannibal's knot is swelling again and Will grinds his hips down until it pushes past his rim until it's inside him. Hannibal comes with a growl, he sucks a bruise into the hollow of Will's throat. Will comes between them, his sensitive cock brushing against the fur on Hannibal's belly, his come mats it down.

They both breath heavily, and Will kisses him again. He wants nothing more than for this to never end.

"Will it always be like this? This clawing need?"

"Fucking you will always be intense, but your heat should only last a few more days. Then if it hasn't taken then in 3 months you will have another. And we will keep going until one takes."

"I want this one to take."

"As do I, my love. I have no doubt that it will." Hannibal carefully leans back with Will atop him,and Will stretches out his legs until he is more comfortable. Then Hannibal rolls them so Hannibal blocks out everything else in the room. It makes Will feel safe and protected.

Will slips into sleep with Hannibal pressing kisses against his face.

***

Will find Abigail playing an instrument by a stream, Winston at her feet. She has taken well to the Unseelie Court, some have said that she must have at least a drop of fae blood in her,

because it is like she has always belonged here.

She looks up when she hears Will's heavy tread. He walks heavier now, Hannibal had been right, the first heat had taken. His stomach is distended to carry their pups safe inside of him. Abigail jumps to her feet and approaches Will and flings her arms around him. She can no longer clasp her hands behind his back but she doesn't seem to mind.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired." Will says with a laugh. "Your father says it won't be long now."

She hums in thought. "Can I touch?"

"Of course." Will says with a grin.

He parts the robe over his belly and her delicate hands skate over the stretched belly. Kicks answer the press of her hands and she laughs with delight.

"They are very active."

"They know that someone loves them so much."

Abigail withdraws her hands and presses a kiss to Will's cheek. "Thank you papa."

Will feels something at his back and he can see Abigail's eyes crinkle in a smile.

"Father!" she cries out in joy and Will's heart leaps.

He hates being apart from Hannibal but Will knows that Hannibal must rule. Even if the Unseelie do as they want to do.

"Hello, my loves." Hannibal says when he approaches him. Will lifts his face for a kiss and Hannibal leans down to kiss him deeply. He feels himself begin to slick. Even in pregnancy his body cannot get enough of him.

"I will take that as my cue." Abigail says with a laugh, "come on Winston. Let's see if we can get some food."

They wait until they can no longer hear Abigail. Then Hannibal takes him there, his hands clenched into the earth next to the stream. Their love shouted into the forest for all to hear, hands clutching against each other.

FIN

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